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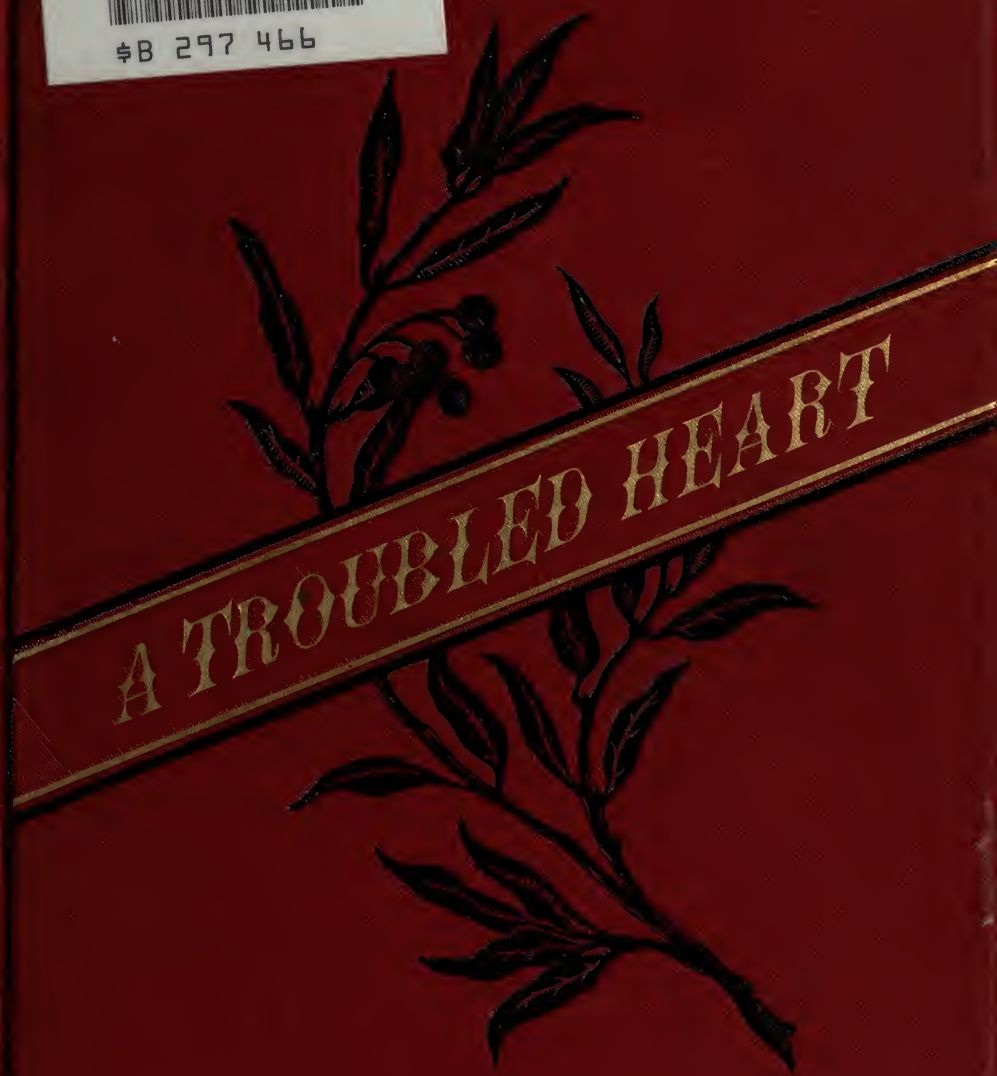

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A TROUBLED HEART

AND

HOW IT WAS COMFORTED AT LAST.

Charles Warren Stoddard

A

TROUBLED HEART

AND

HOW IT WAS COMFORTED

AT LAST.

NOTRE DAME, IND.:
JOSEPH A. LYONS,
1885.

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1885.

TO

THE REV. DANIEL E. HUDSON, C. S. C.,

THIS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY IS LOVINGLY

INSCRIBED.

A WORD TO THE READER.

Let it amaze no one that I have at last chosen to unveil my heart to the possibly unsympathetic eye of the general reader.

Again and again, and yet again, I have been curiously questioned by those who could not follow in the path which led me away from my kinsmen and my comrades, and to whom the mysterious influences which I found irresistible were unknown, or with whom they were of no avail.

What my lips dared scarcely utter—for the decorous recital of an experience so precious to me demanded fit audience and a seasonable hour—my pen in the

serene solitude of my chamber has related unreservedly through the pages of the *Ave Maria.*

O blessed task accomplished! I have set my lamp, though feeble be its flame, where perchance it may light the feet of some bewildered pilgrim. I have cast my bread upon the waters, hopefully awaiting the return—after many days.

NOTRE DAME, IND.,
Feast of the Purification, 1885.

"*Fool, said the spirit unto me, look into thy heart and write.*"

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

"*The heart hath its tears.*"

FATHER FABER.

I.

I was a lonely child. Blessed with brothers and a sister near my own age; nourished always in the tenderest paternal and maternal love; surrounded by troops of friends, whose affection was won without effort, and whose sympathy was shown in a thousand pretty, childish ways, I was still lonely, and often loneliest when least alone.

It was my custom, when my heart was light and my spirit gay, to steal apart from my companions, and, throwing myself upon the lawn, look upon them in their sports as from a dim distance. Their joy was to me like a song, to which I listened with a kind of rapture, but in which I seldom or never joined. Love, intense and absorbing love, and love

alone, was my consolation. This love I know, and have always known, but love has its antipode: it is not hate, but fear.

Very early in life I learned to know fear. I was afraid of strange faces, and more than all else, I was afraid of the dark. How often, when alone in my room at night, have I buried my face in my pillow, to shut out the visions I saw not, yet feared that I might see! When the light was extinguished, I seemed suddenly translated to some unknown world, which my imagination peopled vaguely, and the approach of these invisible and shapeless forms was what I dreaded. Alas! how many innocent little ones are now suffering as I was wont to suffer in the solitude of the night, when a single syllable of love might dispel the direst chimeras! The God to whom I had been taught to pray —whose majesty and glory were beyond my comprehension; whose image was not before me; whose nature came

not within the range of my conception—that God seemed never to have set one star of hope within the blackness of darkness that flooded the fearful night of my infancy. It was not the love of God that filled my heart then, but rather the fear of Him who I had been taught was a jealous God, visiting His wrath upon the sinful: and were we not all sinners? No voice spoke to me out of that fathomless gloom; I drifted on and on, among formless shades, tremblingly awaiting the return of day.

. . . . . .

Our old home in the city stood upon a street corner, opposite a Gothic church built of rough gray stone. Every morning this church was thronged; on Sundays it seemed to me that services would never end there, and this amazed me; for we children were taken to a church on Sunday only—a day which was called "Sabbath" among my people,—and when the eleven-o'clock sermon was ended, and

the "Sabbath school," which followed it, was over, we returned home, and remained there, being too young to be taken out to the evening sermon or lecture.

Many a time did I listen to the music that was wafted from that beautiful church over the way. It was music unlike any that I had ever heard,— music that soothed and comforted me, yet at the same time filled me with an indefinable yearning. At evening, when the light streamed through the richly-tinted windows; when beyond the doors that swung to and fro I caught glimpses of clustering tapers, twinkling like dim stars through clouds of vapor; when I heard thrilling voices soaring in ecstasy above the solemn swell of the organ,— it seemed to me that heaven must be in there; the heaven which my mind refused to picture, and the thought of which, until now, had been embittered by the cruel shadow of death. Once, and once only, did I enter this chapel — my little heaven on earth. I went thither

with our maid; I had begged her to take me, and, without leave, we went together. We were early: the lights burned dimly in the gathering twilight; I saw for the first time in my life a picturesque interior: tapering columns, pointed arches, rose-windows, pictures, statues, and frescos. I saw an altar that inspired me with curious awe; a throng of worshippers, who knelt humbly, and prayed incessantly, so that the quiet of the chapel was broken by the soft murmur of lisping lips. Some one in a long dark robe came from a hidden chamber and lighted the candles upon the altar. This figure seemed of an unnatural height, and more slender than any human being I had ever known; the dark robe clung weirdly in long, straight folds; a strange covering was on the head; it was the *beretta*. Where had I seen something like this before? I grew pale as I tried to recall a race of beings clad in these garments, and of whose history I had somehow gained a knowledge. Then

a priest in cope, attended by a long train of acolytes, approached the altar: a faintness and horror seized me, and, while the hearts of the worshippers joined the rapturous *Alleluia* of the choir, I was borne from the chapel in a paroxysm of terror.

Now I knew, or thought I knew, who these mysterious beings were; I had seen them day after day passing to and fro in a grove overshadowing one wall of the chapel. These, then, were the dark-robed beings who, book in hand, sat or walked in the priests' garden, and whose nature in their passage between the priests' house and the sanctuary had never been clearly revealed to me; indeed, they seemed more shadowy than real as I saw them, over the hedges, flitting in the sombre twilight of the grove. They were such as I had seen again and again as I turned with fluttering heart the leaves of a volume in our library — a chosen volume of Sabbath reading, since it was profusely illustrated with full-page engravings. All that it is

possible to devise in the shape of human torture was depicted in this extraordinary book with a boldness that was hardly short of brutality. I returned to it with fearful interest, fascinated by its horrors; it added a new agony to night's dark and wakeful hours; and now, for the first time, I was persuaded that the book was truth, and not a hideous fable! From that hour for long afterward I could not be prevailed upon to occupy my chamber alone, and often it was necessary to leave the lamp lighted until I had fallen asleep.

That book was a Protestant version of the Spanish Inquisition.

II.

The fear I had of the dark-robed priests, whom I saw daily moving about in the shadow of the chapel, over the way, grew apace. I solemnly believed that if I were to wander upon the other side of the street, alone and unprotected, one of those grave figures would suddenly pounce upon me, bear me away into the gloom of the grove, and the world would never again see me, or know aught of the tortures to which I had been duly subjected. Nor did this conviction make me any the happier during the long hours I spent in the Protestant church, whither I was invariably taken on the "Sabbath" day.

The meeting house was a large, plastered building; severely simple in design, and of the homeliest description within. There was a stiff, high pulpit, with a red

cushion upon it, and faded red draperies behind the sofa, upon which the minister sat during the singing of the hymns. The pews were upholstered in red, or green, or brown, according to the taste of the different owners; but all else within the building was of the dullest gray; even the ungainly windows (which might have been tinted, for the sake of the agreeable light they would then have given) were painted white, and a thick coating of dust upon the exterior made this a dirty gray. There was nothing in all that dreary building for the eye to fall on with a sense of rest; nothing to soothe or comfort the heart; nothing to touch the soul, or to lift it even for a moment above the commonplaces of life.

From the moment the preacher rose in his pulpit to "give out" the hymns, — hymns which were not pleasing to the ear, and when drawled by a congregation of indifferent and uncultivated voices became anything but edifying,— I began to

long for the moment when we might all get out of the place again into the open air. The minister stood with his eyes shut and his hands spread out, while he made very long, wandering prayers, at the close of which everybody bustled and stirred with an audible sense of relief. When his sermon was well begun, the congregation settled into easy postures, and the monotonous droning of his voice soon had visible effect upon some of us; heads began to nod in various parts of the house, and it was with a kind of fascination that I watched the bald pate of an old gentleman, who sat in front of us, as it lolled upon his shoulders, and was suddenly jerked up again at intervals, while the owner of it turned angrily from right to left, with an expression of mingled shame and defiance.

I never comprehended anything the minister said. The monotonous two hours that comprised the sum and substance of that worship seemed an eternity to me;

I dreaded it in anticipation, and was dragged through it Sunday after Sunday in dumb misery. Sometimes, when a window was drawn down from the top, a sunbeam, shattered upon the waters of a canal that flowed under one wall of the building, was reflected upon the ceiling overhead, where it danced like a flock of golden butterflies, and I was innocently happy in watching the airy gambols of those phantom moths. But not every "Sabbath" was I so fortunate. It was a happy day for me when, twisting and turning my neck in childish curiosity, I discovered a picture upon the screen beyond which the organ-blower was secreted; it was an outline of an angel,—an angel floating through the air with a lute poised lightly upon his breast. Here was something for me to dream over — something to help me to forget for the time being the weariness of the "Sabbath" infliction I was destined to endure: sickness alone being a valid excuse for our stopping

away from the "house of worship,"—the sickness which, I fear, we often longed for. My angel in the organ-loft consoled me for a little time only; some one in the pew behind me had noted my wicked fondness for turning my back upon the minister. One day, in the midst of my revery, when my heart was in the skies with that celestial messenger, the man in the pew behind me seized me abruptly by the shoulders and turned me face about. I was startled and abashed; I feared to look again upon the one object in that dismal house that could lead my thoughts to heaven. My last resource was my father's watch. With my head nestled upon his arm, and his watch ticking softly in my ear, I soon fell asleep; and if I awoke to find that the minister was silenced, and the congregation preparing for the general visitation which took place at the close of each service, I was grateful for the deliverance that left me free of a repetition of this mild torture for seven whole days.

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III.

When I was about ten years of age, we children were taken by our mother into a far country, whither our father had preceded us. Our life there was exciting and romantic; for we were upon the frontier, in a new land, among gold-seekers and adventurers; and the children, who were then few in number, were made much of. Two years later it was my lot, and my choice also, to be sent upon a long sea-voyage, as companion to an older brother, who was an invalid, in search of health. For three months we were tossed upon the waves without setting foot on shore. Our ship was a fine one, certainly; but the captain's wife was the only woman on board, and there was but one other passenger beside my brother and myself. I had not yet ac-

quired a taste for reading; I soon grew weary of playing with the toy-ships the sailors made for me; land we saw only for a few days—not more than five out of the ninety odd,—and it was seldom that our eyes were gladdened by the glimmer of a distant sail. It was a sad experience for me; and my brother, whose health was little benefited, was scarcely able to keep me from yielding to despair.

Upon leaving home, my mother's last injunction was to read daily some chapters of my Bible, and this I never failed to do. What solemn hours were mine, alone in my cramped state-room, poring over that wonderful volume, and every day becoming more and more perplexed with its histories and mysteries! I did not then know that the wisest heads have disputed over it; that while it is the fountain of all love, it has likewise watered the seeds of all dissension. It is reasonable to suppose that the most vigorous

exercise of my private judgment was not likely to aid me in the interpretation of even the simplest text. My mental horizon seemed to grow more and more limited as I advanced; I was swallowed up in a solitude as vast as the sea, and seemed to be drifting upon a shoreless waste of waters—alone, helpless, hopeless.

Again and again I wept in my perplexity. There was nothing for me to cling to, not even a straw; no light shone dimly upon my pathway; no voice comforted me in the awful silence of that weary voyage; and when, at night, I had kissed my brother as he lay upon his painful pillow, and had climbed into my berth, I heard the hiss of rushing waters under the keel of the ship, and, thinking of the thousand dangers that beset the mariner upon the trackless sea, I buried my face in my hands and trembled in an agony of suspense.

IV.

At last we came to port and landed safely, three thousand miles from home—twelve thousand by the route we had travelled. For a few weeks I was merry enough; pleased with the novelty of constant change, diverted with much visiting, and likewise with the little local notoriety which my juvenile adventures by land and sea had brought me, I had no care but for the present: the delights of the moment drove from my heart the shadow of a parting that was soon to be.

My brother shortly set forth, alone, upon his return voyage, and I was left in charge of my grandfather, who was a thrifty New-England farmer. This good man proposed to place me at a neighboring school, of some repute in that part of

the country; there he could visit me at intervals, and it was his hope that my vacations might be spent with him. I did not especially relish the prospect; for though he loved me dearly, and was not slow to show it, we were not much in sympathy. He was a very honest, practical, much respected man, of a pronounced Protestant type: relentless and even stubborn in his narrow religious views; he was one in whose veins the blood had flowed coldly from the dark days of the Plymouth Puritans. Often did I see him nervously pacing the floor, that shook beneath his tread, singing with triumphant voice these lurid lines:

> "On slippery rocks I see them stand,
> While fiery billows roll below."

I know, and I knew even then, that he believed this to be the fate of all those whose faith was not his faith; and yet I never heard of his having done any one an injury, and when he died, a sketch of

his life became one of the popular volumes in the "Sabbath-School" libraries.

The new grief in the separation from my brother was gradually wearing away. I liked my school, which was situated about twelve miles from the farm. Once a fortnight my grandfather drove over to see me, and usually brought with him some little gift from the old homestead or from the far-away home. Occasionally I passed a Saturday holiday and Sunday with my grandparents, and stores of baked apples, tarts, and hickory-nuts comforted me in that quiet house.

I was forming new friendships at school, the fond friendships of boyhood—romantic, chivalrous, noble; we showed one another a kind of devotion worthy of young knighthood, for we were the champions of a wholesome and hearty love. Of course I was subject to periodical attacks of homesickness,—what child away from home is not?—but my new friends rallied in such force, and covered me with such com-

forting caresses, that my tears, though stormy, were soon dried, and I was a happy boy once more.

Even the long sermons on Sunday seemed to have lost something of their terrors for me. Perhaps this was because we boys used to troop into church in a body, and sit in a corner, with our chosen companions next us; no doubt a little spirit of mischief, that was always with us, helped to keep us wide awake till the close of the service.

As the winter vacation drew nigh we were all excitement. A thousand plans were laid and unlaid and relaid, over and over; and it seemed to me that the most joyful season of my life was drawing on. I had been formally invited to spend the holidays with my bosom friend, in the society of his family, at their elegant home in the city. All the delights of the gay season in the metropolis had been promised us, and the vision of Christmas-tide was ever before our half-dazzled

eyes. It seemed to us that the joyful day of our departure would never, never come.

It never did! In the midst of our enthusiastic preparations for departure, I received from my grandfather an earnest request to abandon the proposed visit and return to him. What could I do? I parted tearfully with my loved companion, and with a heavy heart obeyed.

V.

The snow lay in deep drifts along the country road; the fences were often hidden, and much of the landscape, so beautiful in summer, seemed to have been effaced forever. Never did the old farmhouse look so desolate and forlorn: its windows half masked in snow, long icicles hanging from the eaves, and the brook frozen over and buried out of sight.

I did not know why I had been called back to the farm; but very shortly my grandfather, whose custom it was to read aloud a chapter in the Bible night and morning, and follow the reading with an extempore prayer, gave me, through the medium of his prayer, an inkling of it.

It seemed that an "Evangelist"—one of those illiterate enthusiasts who profess special inspiration from the Almighty —

had fixed upon a neighboring village as a proper field for his labors; and there he was daily and nightly holding meetings of a sensational character. The conversions which took place under his ministrations were catalogued and advertised far and wide.

I found my grandparents very seriously disposed. I hardly dared to speak. Presently my grandfather took me aside and asked me if I did not choose to love God. Most assuredly I did, but I had never yet learned how; for the only God I knew inspired fear rather than love. Much was said to me about a "change of heart," and said in such a way that I began to feel my heart must be black indeed and greatly in need of being changed; and I the most hardened of sinners, because the very sight of the "Evangelist" repelled me, and my soul sickened whenever he or his works were mentioned. My hour of trial had come. I was daily driven three miles through the snow by my grandfather, who

would not hear of our missing a single meeting, let it storm or shine. Sometimes we were at the church door before it was open, for promptness was one of the good man's crowning virtues. In these emergencies I remained in the sleigh, while my grandfather hunted up the key of the meeting house, split the wood, and kindled a fire in the huge stove within. Then we sat down in silence, and awaited the arrival of the less energetic villagers. Beginning with a chill, that seized me before the fire was lighted, I was gradually driven into a fever through the badly-ventilated, over-crowded room, the heat of the red-hot stove, and the unwholesome excitement that prevailed.

There was a bench under the pulpit which was known as the "anxious seat"! All those who were willing to acknowledge themselves sinners — I remember that the large majority considered themselves not such; — all those who desired the prayers of the prayerful for their sal-

vation; all those who were seeking, or desiring, or even willing to accept that "change of heart," which was pronounced the one thing needful, were requested to step forward in the face of the multitude and boldly station themselves on this "anxious seat,"—or kneel by it if they preferred to do so,—and there undergo the ordeal of prayer. The spectacle was humiliating beyond expression. Nervous excitement and the loss of all self-control drove the timid and shamefaced forward upon this rack of torture. Some of them, embarrassed and bewildered, wrung their hands and cried aloud. Once there, they were not permitted to retreat, but, surrounded by half-frantic men and women, whose flushed faces and flashing eyes were fearful to behold, they were held forcibly upon the bench, where they suffered the torments of the damned, until the close of the session.

And I also suffered alike with these. I also was seized by the arm and shaken,

because I had stolen into a back seat, stupefied with fear, and knew not when I might go mad like the rest of them. Again I was wickedly shaken, and a wild voice shouted in my ear: "Child, don't you want to be saved?" God knows I did. "Don't you want to be a Christian?" I didn't know what it meant to be a Christian: but I didn't want to be a Christian if they were Christians; so I clenched my hands and clung to my seat, frozen with terror. Then I was dragged from the pew and pushed toward the pulpit, while horrid voices almost shrieked in my ears: "Don't you want to be saved? Do you want to die now, this very minute, and burn forever in hell? Don't you want to be a Christian?" The lie was forced to my trembling lips, and I said "Yes." From that anxious seat I was borne, half senseless, into the open air, and permitted to remain there. Still I heard the shrieks and sobs of the miserable victims within the walls of that

bedlam, and all things seemed to swim before my eyes.

It is years since I underwent that degrading inquisition: to-day I cannot think of it without a shudder.

VI.

I know not how long I could have withstood the shock which I daily experienced in that demoralized community. I was threatened with nervous prostration, and every hour I grew more feeble and more excited. At night, as I lay in my bed, in a small chamber under the gable-roof, where the frosty stars seemed to blink at me through the low window with cold, sharp eyes, I wondered why so miserable a sinner as I was permitted to live unpunished; and when the wintry wind was blowing and moaning under the eaves, I trembled where I lay, for it seemed to me that a just judgment was about to be visited upon me.

I cannot but pity myself — though self-pity is a dangerous thing — when I look back upon my youth. I can still remem-

ber my thoughts, my aspirations, my blind hopes, and the unsatisfied yearning that swelled my tender heart almost to bursting; and I know that I was not a bad boy, or certainly not the bad boy—the very bad and wicked boy—I imagined myself to be as I lay awake in that little chamber those dreary winter nights, and wished—yes, wished I had never been born!

Just at this time I received a letter from my paternal grandfather, who lived at a considerable distance from the old farm; grandfather S—— in his letter, knowing that my vacation had come, wrote a most urgent invitation for me to visit him, and spend at least a portion of my holidays at his home. It seemed to me, poor little frightened fool that I was—it seemed to me that it was my duty to stay and suffer the torture of the "anxious seat" *because* it was a torture; this very torture I thought to be a proof of my spiritual darkness.

Was it not my duty to remain there, and try to be glad that I was miserable, and miserably paying the penalty of sin? —was it not my duty to mortify myself daily, to pass my nights in tears and terror, until I had at last experienced that incomprehensible corporeal phenomenon, "a change of heart"? Would it not be doubly sinful in me to fly from a place which had become painful to me in consequence of my imperfections, and seek peace and happiness in the new home to which I had been so cordially bidden? I believed so, and for this reason, and because I wanted to do what was right and for my best good, I secreted the welcome letter and said nothing of it to any one.

Grandfather F——, who knew that I had received a letter, and whose custom it was to read my correspondence, having waited a reasonable time for me to show him the letter, which I had put from me as a temptation and a snare, finally gravely

demanded it, and I saw by his look that he thought me a dissembler. The letter was at once produced and read, when, to my joy, my grandfather embraced me and said, with a twinkle in his eye: "Why did you keep this from me?"

"Because," I replied, "I feared you would think me anxious to leave you, and to get away from the 'Evangelist,' and so I was going to say nothing about it."

"You must go at once," he said, "to visit your grandfather S——. He will think me selfish for having kept you from him so long. To-morrow you will start for his home, and remain so long as you find it agreeable."

I could hardly believe my senses; I could have clapped my hands for joy, and yet, in the midst of my anticipated escape from the misery of the past fortnight I felt guilty in feeling no regret. The next day set me free. I took an express train, that fortunately stopped for a moment at the village where I had been so

sorely perplexed, and the afternoon saw me borne, as upon the wings of the wind, many miles away.

Oh, the relief that came to me with every added moment! oh, the clouds that passed from before my half-blinded eyes; the millstones that fell from my neck; the shadow that was lifted from off my soul! It seemed as if I must take wing, also, and dash through space in the delirious joy of my deliverance. And then, at intervals, came a memory of those whom I had left in the horrible atmosphere which so lately engulfed me; and this memory was my one regret.

VII.

My grandfather S—— was an Universalist; grandfather F—— was not: he was a Presbyterian, or a Congregationalist, or a Baptist, or a Methodist, or something; but which of them all I have never been quite sure. I could not help telling my new grandfather of my late experience with the "Evangelist"; for my heart was full of it, and sore because of it. I talked on and on, like a child who has a grievance, and while I was detailing my emotions—they were still very fresh and vivid—he arose and paced the floor excitedly. He said nothing in reply, though he listened attentively, and when I had concluded he suddenly left the room in indignation. He was careful never to drop a hint which might lead me to think I had been treated unwisely; but I could not

help observing that my two grandfathers were very far from being in sympathy, at least as far as their respective beliefs were concerned.

Sunday was not called the "Sabbath" in this house; I was now allowed to go to church or stop away, as I thought best. I was taken to a circus for the first time in my life, and I thought the graceful performers, in their airy costumes, but little lower than the angels. My Sunday reading was whatever I chose to make it; I was even encouraged to indulge in a game of ball or marbles on Sunday afternoon, and, in fair weather, was driven about the country to my complete satisfaction. In fact, Sunday was almost like a holiday, and I no longer looked forward to it with dread; for I was as free as a bird, and I was made much of at the dinner table, where the jovial Sunday guests took their wine like old-school gentlemen, and on several occasions even toasted me with a pretty compliment, which

brought the blush of pride to my cheek, and a glance of genial patronage from the kind eye of my host.

In the meetings, the Sunday conferences, which my grandfather S—— attended when he felt so inclined, there was a light, bustling air, very similar to that which pervaded the Seminary hall on Friday afternoon during the declamation hour. I could not help comparing it with the unwholesome atmosphere which prevailed in the "revival meetings" of the "Evangelist." I had no longer a thought of fear; nor of love either; nor of reverence; nor of anything in particular. In that community there seemed to be a general understanding that all men are to be saved, whether they will or no; that it is a waste of time trying to be wicked; it is, moreover, ill-bred and disagreeable, and one must submit to salvation in the end, notwithstanding. In short, with them man's chief end was to be sociable and satisfied.

Prayers were never heard in the house where I was then made welcome; nor grace at table; nor was there anything in the outward or inner life of the several members of the household that suggested the possibility of a final judgment. When I went to my room at night — which, by the by, I shared with a distant connection, who was a sojourner there — a lad somewhat my senior, — I astonished my roommate by kneeling at the bedside and silently repeating the prayer my mother had taught me.

It was a simple prayer, and a brief one; and, though I could never be persuaded to omit it, somehow — I wonder how and why! — it always filled me with the deepest sadness. Was it because it was addressed aimlessly to the Deity, who was still, in my mind — the unintelligible Something beyond the stars? Was it because I had never known a direct answer to prayer? because I was beginning to distrust its efficacy? Or did the melan-

choly associations of the past cluster about it, and bring pain instead of easing it, and sorrow rather than relief?

I was daily gaining in health and spirits, and began to outgrow the morbid tendencies of my earlier years; yet often and often I perplexed myself with the vaguest speculations as to the cause of the wide difference between the lives of my two loved and respected ancestors.

VIII.

From this sportive bath — if I may so term it — in Universalism I returned to school. I was purged of much of the melancholy with which the "Evangelist" had imbued me. It seemed to me that since there were so many dissimilar creeds, and when even my own people differed widely in their faith, it mattered little what I believed myself, or, indeed, if I believed anything at all for the present. School-boy friendships comforted my heart; school holidays kept alive my interest in life. I was almost weaned from home, perhaps because I tried not to think of it any longer. When I thought of home I found it was still a sore spot that was touched, and so I gave myself up to the pleasures of the hour, and was all this

time growing as a boy grows — right up like a weed, slender and frail.

When I had fully made up my mind that there was nothing to be done but to patiently await a summons to return, and had actually begun to care very little whether it came now or by and by, in the dim future, I was most unexpectedly called back to my far-away home beyond the sea. There was no especial occasion for this change at that time; I was comparatively contented, and might have continued so for a year or two longer. But a letter came, bidding me pack up and set sail at once; and this I did almost immediately.

We were close upon the end of the school term; were all looking forward to the final exercises with the utmost enthusiasm. As for me, I was expecting to distinguish myself at the closing exhibition; and the frequent rehearsal of a little drama in which my schoolmates and I were to appear had kept us for some

time in a state of delicious excitement. Alas! I knew not that I was to be taken from school before the eventful day, and that my part in the drama—how I had dreamed of it night after night!—was to be allotted to another. I was not even to have the satisfaction of being a spectator on the brilliant night, the proudest hour in the long school year. It was necessary for me to leave school suddenly, in order to secure passage by a ship in which family friends, in whose charge I was placed, were to embark.

My schoolmates, who had shown me a thousand kindnesses, no sooner learned of my intended departure than they, with the aid of my teachers, arranged a little farewell *fete* for my especial delectation. This was flattering indeed, and I endeavored to console myself as best I might, when, on a day sooner than was anticipated, my grandfather F—— made his appearance, to take me home with him at once. He could not remain over for my

sake; he could not conveniently return for me later; and, moreover, he had come at that very time for an especial purpose, and I was to accompany him without delay. I drove away with him in hot haste, with scarcely time to say farewell even to my bosom friends; and though I was silent, I was well nigh heartbroken. Even the thought of setting forth so soon for the home I had vainly longed for could not compensate me in my double disappointment; I was in despair; and when I learned the cause of the good man's precipitous visit I fear I did him wrong, for my spirit was bitter and unforgiving.

With the earnest desire for my spiritual welfare which he invariably evidenced, he had found, as he believed, a favorable opportunity for impressing upon my mind the solemn fact that death is always with us, and that it is our first duty to be prepared for it. It seemed that a lad of about my own age, but one of whom I had never

known anything, had died suddenly: it was to be present at his obsequies, to take warning from the awful suddenness of his death, to listen to the lugubrious wail of funeral hymns, to witness the agonizing grief of the bereaved, that I was brought away from the last embraces of my loving mates.

Never shall I forget that scene. The gloss of the rosewood coffin; the sickly pallor of the memorial wreaths — their odor is still perceptible, and is forever associated with death; the brooding thoughts of death — of death not only of the body, but, as it seemed to me then, the possible death of the soul — of hope, of everything. The whining voice of the minister was at intervals drowned in the audible sobs of those who were gathered about that lifeless clay. What a hollow mockery it all seemed to me!

"I would not live alway,
I ask not to stay — "

sang the choir; but that marble image of

youth, beauty, aspiration, and radiant love turned a deaf ear against the cruel sarcasm, and sealed its dimmed eye, as if in scorn of the singers of such foolish platitudes. Why should he not have lived always, thought I, or at least until he had learned to despise a world that had become hollow and hateful to him? What did that man, who stood droning at the head of the coffin, say to the inconsolable? what could he say to comfort those who were about to hide away forever that marvellous effigy of sleep? what could he or any one of them have said to me that could for one moment sweep away the blackness of darkness that was enfolding my spirit like a pall? They could say that he had been saved from a wicked world, whose wickedness he could not yet have known; that he had been snatched away from a life in which he must have innocently revelled; for the bloom of unsullied youth, the joy of love, and the power of beauty were his. They could

say, and they did say — at least the preacher did — that he had gone to his Maker. How did they know that? What manner of Maker was it who could undo this miracle of life, who would rob the world of its loveliness, and leave the unseemly to wither slowly in their dotage?

O miserable that I was, and without help! I heard only the drawl of hopeless hymnody, the half apologetic interludes of the minister, the moan of those who refused to be comforted; I saw only the sharp outline of that white face; while over all and above all was the mingled odor of fresh varnish and tube-roses. There was the unceasing wonder in my soul why it was not I that was taken instead of that other one in the coffin yonder, for I had often been miserable enough to die.

When the earth had crashed brutally on the lid of the box in the grave, I could think only of the solitary soul that was, perchance, wandering somewhere,

groping blindly and alone, seeking the presence of God. I could think only of the immeasurable loneliness it would find there, for the vast solitude of God was to me unutterably awful and overwhelming.

IX.

Once more I was in my own home and with my own people, after a long separation. We were living on the farther shore of a new land, among mixed races, in a city which has been called the most cosmopolitan in the United States. I was growing into the speculative age; had begun to philosophize, after a fashion, and to analyze my own motives and those of others with whom I was brought in contact.

The state of unbelief in which so many whom I have known have complacently settled themselves has always seemed to me the most uncomfortable of all spiritual conditions; indeed, it is a condition which is totally wanting in spirituality. A conviction of some sort was absolutely necessary to my happiness, I have always

felt that I *must* believe something; but, to tell the whole truth, it did not then seem to me to matter very much what I believed. I began a search after truth, or what I thought to be truth, and my search, at least, was an honest one. I knew God to be the source of all truth. I desired to worship Him; and, as He was worshipped in one form or another in the many and various churches of the city, I wandered from house to house like a weary spirit, seeking that absolute rest which I had never known.

My intellectual preferences led me to favor the Unitarians, who find a series of lectures, composed with literary elegance, and delivered with considerable oratorical grace, all that is necessary to the worship of God. I made the acquaintance of a celebrated "divine," who professed no little interest in my welfare. At his church the musical adjuncts were highly diverting, and for a brief while I was beguiled by the eloquent commonplaces of the minister,

who seldom failed to draw an exceedingly well-dressed audience so long as the fashionable season lasted; at the close of it the church doors were shut, and the celebrated "divine" sought recreation at the seaside, in company with the majority of his parishioners. I looked for fervor; fervor seemed to me indispensable to the love and the worship of God. I found it not. The Unitarian, a superior being, who exchanges compliments with his Creator, and whom legions of angels cannot abash — the Unitarian offered me nothing that I could take home with me, locked up in my heart of hearts, — not even a grain of comfort.

But the Methodist, clutching his ponderous copy of the Scriptures, swinging it above his head with a shriek, while many of his listeners responded with audible "Amens"; and then hurling the book upon the pulpit, in which he roared like a caged lion, — this was a mockery that sickened me. The groans of auditors

have never aroused me to veneration, nor does frenzy do more than weaken my faith in the frenzied.

Between the Unitarian and the various degrees of Methodism I found nothing in the whole range of Protestantism that did not seem to me characterless, colorless, almost formless,—the poorest conceivable substitute for worship in the true sense of the term. What was the gathering together of men, women and children once in seven days to listen to the opinion of a man on this text or that text of Scripture, when I heard, and could not avoid hearing, the criticisms upon the discourse just delivered; the comments, favorable and unfavorable, made by those who considered their opinion as good as any man's? Nor could I help observing the worldly spirit which was everywhere and in a thousand ways evidenced with scarcely an attempt at disguise. It seemed to me that some *form* of worship was necessary; that there could be no

true worship without form; that the mere herding of men, women and children under a "pastor" who told them what he knew, or thought he knew, concerning the word of God and its relation to the life that now is and that which is to come, profitable as it may be in some cases, *is not worship!* I saw no evidence of the presence of God in the building which they called the "house of God." Every symbol, every suggestion of Him and of His manifold attributes, was rigidly excluded from the place dedicated to Him. Even the choir harmony, which should echo the strains of the heavenly choir, filling and thrilling us with the most exalted reverence—the choir rendered a class of music which was calculated to dispel every sentiment of devotion, and to rob the exercises of the single element of beauty left them.

Disheartened, I strayed one evening into a church of the Episcopal persuasion; here I found much, very much, that was totally wanting elsewhere. The somewhat

meagre and meaningless ceremonies were conducted with an assumption of dignified and respectful reverence for something —for what I could not exactly see. I felt that the way was opened a little for me. I was the most willing and the most grateful of novices, but I was destined to suffer many a sad rebuff before the end of my novitiate. In vain did I strive to enter into the spirit of that faith; to me it was spiritless and cold; its forms were formal; and though the prayers are of unrivalled beauty, and the litanies — of Catholic origin—won upon me like the mystical refrain of some antique temple worship; though the music was spiritually elevating, and the architecture a suitable setting for it all, I felt at last that this was a form indeed, but an almost meaningless form, a form without spirit or substance. So I turned from the Episcopal Church, satisfied that it is feebly though expensively nourished by a severely, not to say frigidly, polite commu-

nity,—a community meagre in numbers, but of unquestionable taste.

It was my custom to revisit in turn the houses of these several denominations, striving always to reconcile myself to observances at which I instinctively rebelled. I was constantly laboring under the conviction that if my heart was not touched it was because of the hardness of the heart, and that the fault, of whatever nature it might be, was mine alone.

Once and once only, I suffered myself to be enticed into a public hall where "Moody and Sankey" were holding forth to a mob of ill-bred and irreverent people. I entered that hall in a spirit of honest inquiry; I was open to conviction, and had, for the time at least, dismissed all prejudice from my mind. It was the hour of noon. These meetings were held in the business quarter of the town, for the especial benefit of business men. The public in general, but business men in particular, were invited somewhat osten-

tatiously (by means of placards in large type, distributed upon the street-corners and posted upon the walls,) to repair to —— Hall, —— street, and "*find Jesus*," from 12 to 1 p. m., daily! The intense vulgarity of the proceedings, to say nothing of the blasphemy that prevailed, filled me with disgust; the horror I experienced when subjected to the baleful influences of the illiterate itinerant "Evangelist" returned in such force that I hastened from the place in dismay. Nearly every Protestant denomination in the city was represented there. Messrs. Moody and Sankey created an excitement which all of them combined would fail to do; but by countenancing Messrs. Moody and Sankey, the local ministry could at the close of the season step in and divide the spoils; the converts were parcelled out among them, and the excitement subsided.

Thus the Protestant Church, in its innumerable branches, lent its aid to the

Evangelists, and met for the only time on neutral ground; yet it is but a few steps from the temporary insanity of Messrs. Moody and Sankey's emotional victims to the appalling blasphemies of the "Salvation Army"! I resolved never again to enter a Protestant church; never again to seek to reconcile her multifarious denominational differences; never again to imperil the little peace of mind I had by profitless speculation.

X.

And now came the strangest experience of all. One day I received a letter from a lady who was personally unknown to me, though I knew and had long known her by reputation. She was a conspicuous character; she lectured regularly, on Sundays, in one of the theatres, usually upon a popular topic and in a popular vein, and succeeded in arresting the attention of the large audiences which she drew together week after week.

I had for some time been contributing to various magazines and journals, and, doubtless as much in consequence of my youth as for any literary merit which my juvenile productions betrayed, I had won a kind of romantic local reputation, which I have since wondered was not my ruin. Had I cared more for what the public

thought of me than for what I longed to think of myself, I should hardly have escaped the vainglory that dazzles and confounds so many precocious amateurs.

This lady begged to know me; entreated me to call upon her, and promised me the sort of entertainment which she must have known would be most acceptable to a callow poet. I was, of course, much flattered, and very willingly visited her. She lived in a suburban cottage, in the midst of a small but luxuriant garden. Within that modest home I found repose; surrounded by every element of feminine refinement, we seemed far removed from the weary world, and, for a period, our intercourse was very grateful to me.

Her voice was low and sweet; her manner singularly gentle and winning. It was said of her by the enthusiasts who noisily proclaimed her virtues that she led a nun's life, and that her days were passed in meditation and in acts of silent charity. She certainly seemed to

me one of the most exalted natures with which I had ever been brought in contact. The praise she gave me was enthusiastic but discriminating; the sympathy she showed me won the confidence and gratitude of my heart. She exacted, without so much as asking it, an unconditional surrender. She was what is popularly known as an "inspirational speaker"; her lectures were seldom prepared beforehand, and never written or memorized; on the impulse of the moment she spoke with amazing volubility and brilliancy. She was an earnest, constant, and appreciative reader; hers was a poetic temperament, and she was easily moved to tears; her natural gaiety was tempered by a memory of the sorrow and disappointments with which her life had been filled; and, withal, she was possessed of a profound, intuitive knowledge of human nature. Is it any wonder that I flew to her in my desponding moods, or that she found in me an interesting and interested votary?

It was her custom to entertain me with discourses upon the supernatural. Often, with closed eyes, or a look fixed on vacancy, she would pour forth volumes of eloquent mysticism, to which I listened in rapt wonderment. In her presence I began to feel the influence of which she so often spoke. It seemed to me that the little parlor in which we sat, in a kind of artificial twilight that was quite its own, was the most serenely beautiful of retreats. I almost believed that the good spirits she professed to see, and with whom she apparently held converse, were really near me; that they were in many ways ministering to me; that I was no longer alone in my earthly pilgrimage, for those invisible embassadors — her vassals — were in my confidence, and were no more to leave me, night or day.

Often she gave me messages that thrilled me with hope and joy; always they were such as I longed to hear repeated, and in no case did they fail to

assure me, in one form or another, of the necessity of my seeking them and trusting them and their interpreter — the mysterious lady through whose lips they spoke, and in whose mediumship they found the fullest expression. By her I was slowly led through all the phases of that dangerous doctrine known as "Spiritualism," in which so many noble natures have become hopelessly involved. With her I underwent the ordeal of the test of faith; the whole range of supernatural phenomena was thrown open to me; my ears heard, my eyes saw, my fingers touched the objects which were unaccountably produced for my delectation, and which speedily and unaccountably vanished from my sight. I was in ecstasy; I was ready — nay, eager to accept all things, believe all things, hope all things of the future, in which I was assured the new faith would be the salvation of the world. It was not until the grossest deceptions had been practised upon me that my faith

began to question; I believed blindly, because it was an easy and comforting belief; but having lost faith in one phase of this deluding mystery, my faith was shaken in it all, and I believed no more. Like a house built upon sand, one wave swept it to destruction; and then, and not till then, she who had been my guide, philosopher and friend; who had counselled me in my perplexity, comforted me in sorrow, and whom I thought to be the pattern of all the virtues—she proved to be a priestess among the modern pagans, and an advocate of their unholy and lascivious rites.

XI.

Thrown rudely back upon myself, having by this time lost confidence in everybody and everything, there was still in my heart the yearning after the unattainable. I dreamed more than ever; indeed, my life was more than half a dream. I wondered why, in the whole wide world, there was no form of religion such as I felt the absolute need of, and without which I was as one cast away in the desert. Then in my imagination I erected the altar before which I longed to prostrate myself in tenderest devotion. It was my intention to secretly set up a tabernacle in my chamber — a place of sacrifice, to which I might enter alone and unobserved, and there offer the prayer which was ever in my heart and

often upon my lips. Adjoining my chamber was a closet, lighted by a rose-window; this would admirably answer my purpose; the glass of the window could be stained so that a beautiful and unearthly glow would suffuse the place; the walls, hung with rich draperies, were to enclose me as with curtains of cloud; the ceiling would be of azure, starred with golden stars; the floor cushioned deep with velvet rugs, on which to kneel in the hour of my retreat. There was to be an altar white as the new-fallen snow,—an altar decorated with the emblems of death and immortality; an altar gilded and draped with lace, and having tapers upon it, which were to be lighted whenever I entered that sanctuary. I wanted these tapers to be many, and I wished that they might burn forever; for they were to stand before a shrine with golden doors, which doors were to be kept closed, save only when I could open them in a spirit of unspeakable reverence.

I could never, even in imagination, furnish that shrine with sufficient splendor. I wanted the loveliest light to radiate from the holy of holies when I bowed before it with a broken and a contrite heart; for therein was to be enshrined the image of the Son of God, while all about were choirs of chanting Cherubim and Seraphim, and in the midst thereof the Holy Spirit hovering in the form of a white dove. Fresh flowers were to breathe fragrance in the ceaseless serenity of this temple; balsams and frankincense and myrrh were to smoulder there in brasiers and tripods. I was to put the shoes from off my feet, and to bathe, and to put on a suitable garment before I entered this to me most sacred, as it was the most secret of chambers. No eye save mine was to behold it; no ear to have any knowledge of it whatever; for the world I had trusted had betrayed me, and I now

sought only to be alone with God in the temple I had builded for His sake. Such was my dream,— a dream never to be realized.

XII.

The love of music was with me a passion. Melody soothed me in excitement, and aroused me from periods of lethargy to healthful spiritual and mental activity. My music-master, a German enthusiast, had often spoken to me of his choir and organ, and of the classical masters whose creations it was his delight to render.

There was to be, on some high festival in the church of which he was musical director, a very famous composition produced, with an efficient chorus and full orchestral accompaniment; and my master urged me to be present on that occasion, promising me a seat by his side near the organ. I met him at the door of the Cathedral; it was with difficulty that we made our way to the organ-loft, so dense was the throng that had long

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since filled the pews, galleries, and aisles, and so great the crowd in the vestibule and upon the steps and pavement before the Cathedral doors. From my position by the organist, above the heads of the singers and instrumentalists, I looked into the mystic nave, and saw the high altar with its constellations of twinkling tapers, and the soft glow of the lesser lights upon the altars in the transepts. I saw the glorious paintings, the exquisite statues, and the admirable architectural surroundings; and, though I could not but recur with some slight taint of suspicion to my early experience in the chapel opposite the old homestead, I had developed sufficient self-composure to carefully survey all and heartily admire all that I saw and heard.

At last I beheld a congregation that shared a single sentiment; the whole body seemed swayed by one emotion, yet each member of that vast body was individually absorbed in a private devo-

tion. Where else had I seen such an impressive spectacle? where else such reverent decorum? where else *could* I have seen it? I was deeply moved, and when my master touched the keys of his superb instrument, and a prelude as delicate and as full of inspiration as the song of the soaring lark was breathed among the stately pipe columns that towered almost like a forest above our heads; when the long procession of acolytes entered and, bowing before the tabernacle, ranged themselves within the altar-railing; when the deacons and the priests followed, preceding the bishop in his splendid vestments; when the solemn ceremonials were in progress, and the incense-clouded air trembled with the gush of melody that seemed to permeate the very stones of the edifice and to sway that mass of humanity as the tide is swayed slowly to and fro; when every heart seemed to respond to a single pulse —a pulse throbbing in one great heart

that was burned with the love of God,—when I began to realize this I held my breath and prayed that the ecstasy of that hour might never end. It was a mighty mystery that struck me dumb with awe!

Of the inclinations, salutations, and genuflections; of the vesting and unvesting, the cap and mitre, the cruets, incense-boats and censers; of the candles, torches, missals; the ablutions and chiming bells; of the deep and ominous silence that fell upon us at intervals; the elevations, the thrice solemn administration of the Sacrament, and the sublime benediction, I knew nothing, and less than nothing; for I doubtless misinterpreted very much of all that I saw and heard. But to see and to hear was enough, and more than enough: my hungering and thirsting soul was fed with spiritual manna; it could no longer content itself with husks!

My master, who had been absorbed in his professional duties, turned to me

when he at last lifted his hands from the organ. The great building was nearly empty; a few worshippers still knelt in the body of the church, or were grouped before the several altars; two sanctuary boys were carefully and deliberately extinguishing the tapers upon the altar; a priest was kneeling within the railing, and everywhere still floated the faint, blue filmy clouds that sweetened the air, so that it seemed to have blown softly from the gardens of paradise! — and my master turned to me! I could not speak; I felt that my cheeks were colorless, and, as we walked away from the Cathedral door, and were parting at the street corner, he said to me: "Well! will you come again?"

Come again! My ideal temple, my dream-sanctuary, with its crude and feeble symbolism, had crumbled into ruins and utterly vanished before this august reality. This was reality indeed; but it was a reality of whose majesty I was fully con-

scious, though as yet I knew absolutely nothing of its marvellously beautiful significance. Would I come again? I nodded my head in token of assent; yet at that moment something within me seemed to struggle against it and to raise a question of doubt. Is there anything in the wide world more tenacious of life than an inherited prejudice?

XIII.

I did go again and again, and yet again. A seat was always reserved for me in the organ-loft, and from that serene and curtained seclusion I witnessed the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, until I began to grow familiar with its forms, at least, and to long earnestly to comprehend their signification. Our maid, at home, was a Catholic, but she had never in any way sought to influence me in favor of her religion; nor was she aware that I was in the habit of attending Mass and Vespers when so inclined.

The faith of my people was dying out, or growing lukewarm. What was there to call them to a church, if the minister chanced not to be an agreeable speaker? They were liberal Protestants, growing more and more liberal from year to year,

and they followed the majority in the track of the sensational pulpit orator — the favorite of the hour. Even family prayers had become infrequent, and we children, grown now to the years of discretion, attended them or not as we saw fit. Grace at table was often omitted or forgotten; and, I suppose, the natural, the inevitable tendency of Protestantism was as evident in my home as in any Protestant home of to-day, and no more evident than it is and must be everywhere.

The stubborn prejudices which I found it difficult to eradicate, and which they still clung to, were what led them to visit a church at intervals; and in most cases they did so in a critical or curious mood, rather than in a spirit of reverence or from a sense of duty. They knew at this time that it was my custom to attend the Catholic church, but thought that I went only to listen to the choir; and, though they sometimes asked me if I would like

to hear this or that preacher, in whom they were for the time being interested, they never urged me to accompany them, and made no objection to my seeking salvation in any way that I saw fit.

I was groping in the dark when a little light threw a ray across my path, suddenly, unexpectedly, as if a star had fallen. One day, on the mantel-piece in our dining-room,— shall I ever forget that mantel, or the corner of it on which the wee book in its brown paper cover was lying!— I found a copy of "The Poor Man's Catechism." I had never before seen a Catholic catechism, nor any Catholic book whatever; but we had stores of anti-Catholic works, and the discovery of this little spy in the camp somewhat startled me. I at once took it away to my chamber and began to read it.

I was on my guard when I turned the first pages of that homely little pamphlet; it was a poor and ragged thing, by no means calculated to prepossess any one

in its favor. I was even inclined to be antagonistic when I began to read; but the simplicity, and truth that shone from every page disarmed me; the plain, direct questions and the plain, direct answers were just such as I had been longing to ask and to receive. Here they were in my own hands, to be asked as often as I chose, and answered immediately and always. I became profoundly interested; I could not lay down the little oracle till I had gone through it two or three times over. I read it first with curious interest; and then re-read it, to make sure that I had read it aright; then read again, to clear some obscure point, or to get the full meaning of certain passages. What a reading was that when, finally, I read it slowly and earnestly, asking myself after each separate answer, "Can you believe this?" "Do you believe it?" After each and all of those answers I answered, and I answered triumphantly, "I can and I do!"

I resolved to become a Catholic at once; I supposed that I had only to say as much and I should immediately find the doors of the Mother Church thrown wide open and the stray sheep admitted into the fold without question. This is probably the impression which prevails among non-Catholics. I have heard of those who have been made Catholics almost before they knew it, and possibly without their full consent; as if one might be caught and branded, and then turned loose again, the property of a new owner! I have always heard this from non-Catholics, and no doubt they believed what they were saying.

The question with me was to whom was I to offer myself, now that my path was made straight? In the wide circle of my friends and acquaintances there was not one Catholic that I knew of,—my music-master professed nothing. Our maid had said to me, "Go to the priest!" Good soul, she little knew that I had

never spoken to one, and was still half afraid of them, one and all. Now, for me to go boldly to the priest's door and knock, asking to be admitted and adopted, required more moral courage than I was possessed of; and so the weeks and months passed by, I going regularly to Mass, and timidly, no doubt awkwardly, crossing myself with holy water; for I believed it was not wrong for me to do this much, even if I were not yet a Catholic.

One day I stole cautiously into a Catholic bookstore, and, after a great deal of hesitation (for I was divided between desire and distrust), I selected and purchased a fine large crucifix, which I secreted under my coat and conveyed privately to my chamber. It was a long time before any member of my family was aware that I had that precious crucifix in my possession. I was afraid to tell them; but why I was afraid I know not; perhaps I was afraid of being laughed at,

and of having *it* ridiculed. Oh, how happy was I with it, when the whole truth was out at last! I *was* laughed at for my superstition, but I smothered my grief and anger; I held my peace; I hung the blessed symbol of our Redemption upon the wall above my bed, and prayed there night and morning as I had never prayed before.

How was I to begin to be a Catholic? —that was the question that I asked myself every hour in the day. Often I knelt in the church during day or evening, hoping some one would discover my anxiety by a sign, and come to my relief. Often I went to the very door of the priests' house, and hung about there, not daring to knock, but trusting that I should ultimately attract the attention of the priests, and be met at least half way. I was always talking of the Church, stupidly and ignorantly, no doubt, but with honest enthusiasm; frequently I was ridiculed for my pains; and thus the time passed,

and I was no nearer the longed-for goal than at the hour when I first opened the little brown pamphlet that helped me take the first step toward Truth.

That Catechism I kept, and I have it still; I had a right to keep it, for none of us was ever able to ascertain when or how it came into the house. No owner was ever found for it, and no one knew who placed it upon the mantel. When it came into my possession I was the only one who had seen it or had knowledge of it.

XIV.

A certain lady of liberal tendencies who had published several books, and whose house was the resort of all classes of people, had made much of me—yet not enough to spoil me. The favoritism which she did not hesitate to show me at all times and in all places had given me no little distinction in her very extensive and by no means exclusive social circle.

Had it been possible for me to content myself with mere applause, it is probable that I might never have been more than an enthusiastic though ingenuous admirer of the external beauty of the Catholic Church; but the craving of my heart, that drove me, yea even starved me, out of Protestantism, and left me to seek relief in many and various quarters, was not to be satisfied with this alone. I accepted

gratefully whatever worldly consolation—and it was of the earth, earthy—my friend could offer me; met many strange and interesting people in her society, and was no doubt diverted for the time; but desire never failed me, and when I had gone out from her presence I was immediately disinterested and disturbed.

On one occasion when, in wandering aimlessly about the town, I found myself in the vicinity of my friend's house, I resolved to enter and pass an idle hour with her. She was at home, was receiving a solitary guest—a lady whom I had never before met. I was of course presented, and the conversation, which my entrance had interrupted for a moment, was resumed. I forget the subject of that conversation; I remember nothing of all that was said, save that some careless witticism of the hostess concerning what she was pleased to call the "saint-worship" of the Catholic Church aroused my ire. I remember that I said to her, somewhat

hotly: "Have you no reverence for that glorious type of womanhood, the Blessed Virgin?" I believe that she had, and was quick to acknowledge it; but immediately the other lady who was present turned to me and asked: "Are you a Catholic?" Without hesitation, though I knew nothing of her or of her faith, I replied, half defiantly: "No, but I should like to be." The hostess laughed gaily at my earnest manner, and the subject was skilfully dropped. It might all have ended there; but, please God, it was not to end; it was rather a beginning, and the best beginning I had yet made.

When I rose to take my leave, the lady rose also, and together we passed out into the street. There she asked me if I would walk her way; and thus I came to accompany her to her house, which was not far distant. Meanwhile this brief dialogue was all that passed between us:

"Do you really desire to become a Catholic?"

"Of all things, Madame, it is this I most desire."

"Then, why do you not place yourself under the instruction of some priest?"

"Because I have never had the happiness of knowing one."

"I can very easily make you acquainted with my confessor, who is to visit me to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock. If you would like to meet him, come here, to my house, at that hour, and I will gladly present you."

At last I felt that my hand was upon the latch of the door, at which I had been vainly knocking for so long and so weary a time.

XV.

The name of this good lady I have forgotten; indeed I saw her only twice, and I never knew anything of her history or her fate. The house where she then lived I still remember, and I have watched it through its many vicissitudes with a kind of personal interest such as I have felt for few houses. It has been tenanted by all sorts and conditions of men; was sometimes tenantless, with a placard hung in the uncurtained window; and again the windows would be thronged with children's faces, and the halo of happiness was over it all. Finally, it has become one of several similar buildings, swarming with rustics and day-laborers, who find in this little colony (known under the general name of somebody's Temperance Hotel) extraordinarily cheap

board and lodging per day, week, and month.

When I went to the house at the appointed hour, I was shown into a pretty parlor, where a fine engraving of Pope Pius IX., of blessed memory, filled the place of honor upon the walls, and all the pictures were of a sacred character. The hostess was looking anxiously for the arrival of the priest; she began to fear that he might not come at all, for his duties were onerous though grateful, and he might at the last moment have been summoned to the bedside of the sick or the dying. He came when we had quite despaired of his coming; he had been called away, and had hastened to meet us, if only for a moment, inasmuch as the lady, who feared that something might prevent him, had sent him word of my desire to meet and confer with him on an important question.

He was a modest, almost diffident young priest, not very long in orders, and

was one of several who were stationed in one of the most populous parishes in the city. He looked weary and worn, but was cheerful, and had even a subdued, boyish gayety that charmed me and soon put to flight all the embarrassment which I otherwise might have experienced; and he easily won my confidence. I felt that we were to be fast friends; and yet the clerical cut of his garb, and the peculiar and undefined reserve—which is a characteristic of the clergy—reminded me always that I was for the first time in my life face to face with one of those beings who had been the horror of my infant years.

What did he say to me? I hardly know; we talked of everything but religion. We laughed and joked, and were shortly as cosy as possible; and then he abruptly took his leave, for he had still many things to do. The atmosphere of that little parlor seemed sweeter and more peaceful for his presence; and even

in his absence something of that sweetness and serenity remained.

It was agreed that I was to visit him on the evening following. I was to await him in the chapel of his parish as he came from the confessional; and I impatiently looked forward to that hour, for the young priest had no sooner left me than I wished him back again. He was, in truth, perfectly new to me, and unlike any one whom I had ever known. On the morrow, then, in the chapel, I was to await him at the confessional. How the knowledge of this would have chilled the marrow in the bones of my respective grandsires! Neither of them ever knew it, for both of them died soon after.

XVI.

Dear little, dingy chapel! how dark you were that night! and how dark the street, with the wind and the rain driving against my face, as I went in search of you!

That night I chanced to run across a friend, who turned to walk with me. Him I had to get rid of in some way, but how? I told him I had an engagement, and his fraternal curiosity (for we were intimates) was at once aroused. To satisfy him, I resorted to invention. (How delicately I am putting it now; for, to be plain with you, it was a falsehood I told him!) Was it shame, false shame that persuaded me to keep my interview a secret, and encouraged me in deliberately misleading him? Ought I not to have gloried in the step I was about to take, though I took it almost blindly, and alone, and in the darkest of

dark nights? My friend left me in perplexity, for I fear there was guilt in my voice; but he did not leave me till I had led him past the door of the chapel and quite out of my way; then I made the circuit of the square, and coming again to the chapel door, which stood invitingly open, I looked up and down the street, which was deserted at the moment, and then quietly stole within.

Dear little, dingy chapel, that has given place—though not without rivers of tears from the hearts that knew and loved you—to the stately edifice, with its chimes of joy-bells far aloft in the great, high tower!

A single lamp burned like a golden star before the altar and the Blessed Sacrament; two or three glimmering lights threw a feeble ray in the far corners of the chapel, where groups of penitents were crouching near the confessionals. What an unearthly stillness was there! I looked with awe upon those who were humbling themselves before him unto whom is given

the power to loose and to bind sin. I listened, with beating heart, to the low mutter of lips within the curtained niches; the noiseless stir of the screen that hid the confessor from view thrilled me. When would my turn come to enter that dim retreat and pour out my iniquities at the feet of those servants of God? When might I arise from there with a clean heart and a spirit whiter than snow? I knelt in the chapel, lost in a vague revery, wondering if I had yet a right to kneel there; wondering how they feel who go in and come out from under the drapery of the confessional; wondering if the quenchless star whose pale beam falls forever upon the golden doors of the tabernacle might not dart one ray into the dim chamber of my heart and illumine it forever.

A hand touched me lightly upon the shoulder. I turned: it was the young priest, now clad in the long, dark robe which was the horror of my childhood;

but I had overcome all fear, and full of trust I rose and followed him. As we passed before the Blessed Sacrament the young priest prostrated himself for a moment; the impulse to follow his example was irresistible. We arose together, and entered a door that admitted us to a passage connecting the chapel with the priests' house.

I was taken into a small study walled with books, and was there, in the kindest spirit, carefully and freely questioned. Never before had I realized how little I knew of the great scheme of salvation. I was to begin at the beginning, for I had everything to learn; and yet it is probable that I knew as much of Catholicism as any Protestant, and possibly I knew far more than most of them.

We looked over many volumes in that library; the history, the philosophy, the poetry of the Church was gradually laid open to me. I felt as if I were entering a new world—a world full of mysterious

beauty and fascination. I felt that I could never learn enough of this marvellous Church — never begin to know as much of it as I should know; but what perplexed me more than all was the false knowledge which I had to unlearn, the cruel misstatements which had to be corrected, and the latent, inborn prejudices which I must needs root out and trample underfoot.

More than once that evening we were interrupted: poor men and poor women came to lay their troubles before this youthful Father. What a world of care was his! it was a word of advice or encouragement to one; a little substantial aid to another; a willing promise to do this or that for a third—enough, it seemed to me, to tax the strength of the stoutest, and to keep a dozen busy for days to come.

This was his daily life; rest he never knew; weariness he discountenanced;

famine and pestilence he feared not; himself the servant of servants, worthy indeed of his hire, was unremunerated in a profession exacting to a degree, of unceasing activity, and peculiarly circumscribed and exclusive.

Above us was a small, plainly furnished chamber; within it there was a bed, which was neat and clean and hard; a crucifix also, and a few pious pictures; a holy-water font, and an uncushioned *prie-dieu.* Thither he repaired at a late hour, seeking the brief sleep allotted him. He did not leave me that night till I had reluctantly withdrawn, taking with me several works of a controversial character, which I was to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest"; and then exchange them for others, which were at my disposal.

Of all the ministers whom I had met, where had I found one worthy to be compared with this modest young priest? He immediately won my esteem, and I re-

solved to visit him as often as I might without intrusion. Alas! he was almost immediately removed to some distant country parish, and him I never saw again, nor heard of more.

XVII.

The young priest in his unexpected departure had not been unmindful of me: I could still exchange books at the library in the priests' house whenever I chose to, and I was made acquainted with a Catholic lady, who, in turn, made me known to the Jesuit Fathers at St. Ignatius' College. All went smoothly now; and it was with a sense of absolute relief that I saw myself welcomed by the wise and powerful yet humble Order whose very name is a bugbear in the ears of Protestants and unbelievers. One of the Reverend Fathers, a grand old man, was to take full charge of me; I knew always where to seek him, found him at all times accessible, and between us there sprang up an affectionate familiarity that was uninterrupted until his death.

Spirit of my beloved preceptor — the shadow of whose sublime countenance, still hanging upon my wall, now refreshes my memory—O desert me not! but from the serenity of thy sacred sphere lead me and direct me as thou wert wont to when my feet stumbled and my heart was faint.

It was Father A——, of the Society of Jesus, who made my perplexing studies a delight. It was to him I confided the last vestige of the inborn prejudice which so tenaciously clung to me. It was he who said to me, "Read what you will, so long as you read earnestly and honestly the books I give you." At that time I read many anti-Catholic works, probably at least one for every Catholic book the good Father gave me. More than once I went to the doors of Protestant churches, intending to give them a final trial; but my revulsion was so great that I was forced to turn from them, feeling that at last I had burst the bonds of their bigoted and ignorant prejudice.

I believe any reasonable man cannot read in connection a Catholic and an anti-Catholic work without discovering the logical truth of the one and the false premises of the other. Childish and stupid seem to me the arguments of the Protestants; empty, vulgar, and worthless the tirades of infidels and fanatical writers. I would not recommend any Catholic to read aught of those; they are vanity and vexation of spirit; they are full of subtle poison, that robs the heart of rest, of health, of hope—of everything. A single page of plausible falsehood may pervert an unprejudiced mind so that a whole volume of truth will hardly restore it; therefore leave them alone.

Protestants may fortify themselves with the bulk of their best known treatises, and believe themselves secure; but let them read standard Catholic writers; these books will be volumes of revelation to them; let them carefully compare all, and I venture to assert, if the readers be

of sound judgment, they will soon lean joyfully toward the Mother Church, and do so with a heart full of pity and amazement at the magnitude of the Protestant and infidel misconception of the truths of that venerable Church.

About this time one of my chosen friends—I might almost say my bosom friend—was a popular young Protestant minister. We were so intimate that he could not but see the drift of my thoughts, and it was no doubt with horror that he noted the gradual development of my love and reverence for, and my growing trust in, a doctrine which was in his eyes an abomination. I had been very fond of him, for we had much in common: our tastes in music, art and literature were one, and we were usually swayed by a single emotion. It was a rare and beautiful friendship. He was young, enthusiastic, refined, with a singularly winning manner; yet I could not but compare his worldly condition with that of the youthful priest

—the first I met—and of my venerable Jesuit Father. It is true, the latter was one of an Order possessed of great wealth and vast influence, yet the private apartment of my reverend Father was a bare cell; and I remember that beside his Breviary and his rosary he had no earthly possessions, not even an album to hold the half-dozen photographs some friends had sent him. And yet he had been of a noble family in Italy, possessed of a vast fortune, which he poured into the coffers of the Church-charities, and his early life had been passed at the brilliant court of Naples in the palmy days of that reign.

But no—I had forgotten; he was the possessor of an ebony snuff-box, bearing a medallion of the Madonna upon the cover; O Father A——! Father A——! may you be pardoned this solitary extravagance by the revilers of your holy Order! I know beyond question that your purse was always light.

My ministerial friend, on the other

hand, being a handsome bachelor, and "a great catch," occupied a suite of rooms in the house of one of the most fashionable members of his congregation. His study was a *boudoir*, filled with æsthetic *bric-a-brac;* his chamber a triumph of elegant upholstering. He had numerous albums, richly bound, and filled with the finest specimens of the photographer's art. Constantly in the receipt of dinner and social invitations, tokens of esteem, bouquets, and all manner of flattering attentions, he—poor, puzzled boy—seemed to pass a good portion of his time in laying up embroidered slippers and smoking-caps—the handiwork of young lady admirers — against the rainy day of his declining popularity. We were often together at one time, but the day came when he felt that he must save me from taking the step I was meditating, and, after a long, wordy and heated argument, we parted in coldness, and the coldness, very naturally grew apace — it

grew, till I ultimately lost sight of him entirely.

Meanwhile I had been diligently prosecuting my studies, and in my frequent and lengthy interviews with Father A—— had begun to see my way clearly, to walk firmly in the path he led me, and to cling steadfastly to the one hope of being received into the Church. I felt it but reasonable and proper that I should make known to my parents the sole desire of my heart, and one day I did so. We were sitting together, after dinner, in the cosy library. My father, who had been reading aloud to us, laid down his book, and, not knowing exactly where or how to begin, I out with the whole truth at once. I said, abruptly: "I have resolved to join the Catholic Church"; and there I paused. For some time we were all silent; then my mother spoke: "I trust that you will not hastily take any step that you may hereafter have cause to regret." "I am not taking it hastily," said

I; "I have been thinking of it for a very long time, and I am satisfied that my only happiness rests in it." Then my father added: "You are old enough to reason for yourself and with yourself, but I would advise you to consider well before you have gone too far."

We were all sadder that evening than we had been before, and there were tears in my mother's eyes when I kissed her good-night; but the subject was never again mentioned among us. A few days later, Father A—— said to me: "Whom will you choose for godfather?" I actually knew no one to turn to in this emergency, and so Father A—— added: "I can bring you one who will do you honor; you will be baptized in the baptistery of the Cathedral, at two o'clock on Saturday next."

XVIII.

It was a strange, eventful season for me of which I now write. I could not close my eyes on the night preceding my baptism, and when Saturday came I was nervous and depressed. Of course, I had never been baptized (my parents did not believe in infant baptism); and, as the palpable "change of heart" had never caused me much uneasiness — somehow my heart would not or could not change —a Protestant baptism had never seemed to me a necessary means of grace, and I had lived on and on without fear of mortal sin.

A little before two o'clock on the appointed day I entered the Cathedral. Sunshine was flooding the nave with a rich, mellow light; some one was noiselessly wreathing the high altar with fresh

flowers. Without the sombre walls was the rumble of the great city; within was a holy and unutterable peace; but my heart beat wildly and would not be quieted. I heard footsteps approaching as I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament; in a moment Father A—— was kneeling by my side, in silent prayer. Presently he turned and whispered to me, and we quietly withdrew to the baptistery. My emotions were indescribable. A gentleman who was with Father A—— was made known to me; he was to be my godfather. He was a distinguished convert, the author of a remarkably able and logical volume entitled "The Path which Led a Protestant Lawyer into the Catholic Church."

Under the beautifully tinted window of the baptistery stood the white marble font. But let me confess at once that throughout the administration of that most solemn Sacrament I was filled with an awe that dulled rather than quickened

my senses. No one was present save us three and an assistant. I was carefully and tenderly directed to the end, and then my emotions became uncontrollable, and throwing myself on the breast of my godfather, who, with Father A——, affectionately embraced me, I shed floods of tears.

We returned to the altar, and there, kneeling between these spiritual and temporal advisers, I laid my heart in absolute surrender. From the steps of that altar I seemed to rise a new being. I had shattered the chrysalis, and the wings of my soul expanded in the everlasting light that radiates from the Throne of Grace. They left me there. I was glad to be alone; a great calm had fallen upon me, and I feared lest even the most friendly of voices might trouble or dispel it. When I passed into the street, I kept saying to myself: "I am a Catholic! I am a Catholic at last!" and it seemed to me then as if my eyes were just opening upon another and a better world.

XIX.

Did any one ever approach the mysterious portal of the confessional for the first time without a feeling of awe? My turn came at last. It was on a night when many penitents were gathered in the dimly-lighted chapel. For a time I held aloof, not knowing exactly what to do, nor how to do it. Of course, the formula and the instructions were in my prayer-book—I had long since purchased a prayer-book,—but I felt awkward and half afraid; and so I knelt apart from the others, and patiently awaited my turn.

People came and went. Probably the majority of them knew what priest was in each confessional; but I knew not, nor did it matter at all to me. What worried me now was how to get safely in there, how to get through my confession with as

little confusion as possible, and then how to get safely out again. I saw that I must kneel in the train of those who were to be confessed, one after the other, and follow them as they drew nearer and nearer to the curtain that hung before the little closets of the confessor; and so, finally, there would be nothing for me to do but to enter as the last one made his exit. I did this with my heart climbing up into my very throat as I got closer and closer to the closeted priest. I was intent upon my prayers, and upon the formula with which I had striven to make myself familiar, and was almost unconsciously getting on and on toward the hidden one. All at once some one who was next before me arose and disappeared; I looked after him; he had secreted himself behind the swaying curtain. There was a pause, a very long pause it seemed to me, and then I heard a rustling and a clatter as of a sliding shutter. A penitent emerged from the

farther side of the confessional, and his place was immediately filled by another.

By this time I heard unintelligible whispering near me, or a deep sigh now and again, and soothing sibilants that flowed continually, until the invisible shutter was slid back again. Almost immediately my side of the confessional was vacated. I arose and entered, kneeling fearfully in that small chamber — no doubt one of the smallest chambers in all the world. A heavy, green curtain shut in the darkness; I saw only that there was a crucifix upon one hand, and a little square lattice, with a gauze screen behind it, directly in front of me; and that this lattice was closed by a solid inner shutter. I heard faintly the whisper of the confessor, who was beyond the screen, and I waited, now full of contentment and quite at ease.

The exquisite sense of secrecy and security—as if I were literally out of the world, and far beyond its reach—thrilled

me with a strange joy. It seemed to me that there I could wait for hours without impatience; but I heard the rustle and the clatter again, and in the next moment the inner shutter was slid away, and I saw the profile of a priest (whom I had frequently seen) dimly outlined against the faint gray light that shone beyond him. It was a sudden though not unexpected climax, and I was thrown off my guard. I began in great embarrassment the confession which I had made to myself over and over again, and in less than half a moment found myself hopelessly involved. There was but one thing to be done then, and I did it with all my heart; I threw myself upon the mercy of my confessor; I said: "Father, this is my first confession; please help me to make a good one." From that moment I felt as if I held God's embassador by the hand—and how I clung to him! I felt as if he had thrown his protecting arm about me; as if he would

henceforth aid me, and encourage me, and sustain me, and stand between me and the temptations of the world. I then had but one wish; it was that I might search my heart, and find if in some dark corner of it there were not still the shadow of a lurking sin, and that I might then root it out and bring it to him in absolute contrition. I wanted him not to dismiss me yet, but to reprove me again as gently and as gravely as at first, and to offer me once more the consolation he had already so freely given. Then came the absolution, like a fountain of healing and refreshment, and I was bidden to go in peace.

O what joy entered into my soul when I passed from that confessional and prostrated myself before the altar of the Mother of God! Rapt in the profound spirit of love and trust and gratitude, I felt the inexpressible happiness of the child who knows that he is freely and wholly forgiven.

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Long after I was in Rome. There was a *fete* at the American College, and a priest from my old home, with whom I had passed many hours among the shrines of the Holy City — one whose singular privilege it was to decline a bishopric,— was entertaining some of the notable foreign prelates who were present with reminiscences of our far country. Again and again he had appealed to me to bear him witness when the Monseigneurs expressed amazement at the prolific spawn of American infidelity.

"He knows," said my reverend friend; "for he is a convert, and has been familiar with unbelievers."

"Yes, Father," cried I; "and it was to you that I made my first confession."

He had not known it till that hour.

XX.

The supreme moment approached; I was, on the morrow, to make at early Mass my First Communion. No one knew of this, save Father A—— and my godfather; and they alone knew of my private baptism. It was a solemn night for me which preceded this crowning joy. I slept little, and then but lightly; more than once in my feverish dreams I approached the altar, and as the celebrant exposed the consecrated Host a chime of silver bells clashed in my ears, and I suddenly awoke, feeling myself unworthy to receive the Body of our Lord. How thirsty I grew with a double thirst—the thirst of the lips and the thirst of the heart! And the thirst of my lips seemed to me to be a temptation sent by

the evil one to confound me in my last hour.

In the gray light of the morning I stole noiselessly out of the house and hastened to the Cathedral. The great sanctuary was already filled with the multitude of the faithful, who were humbling themselves in the presence of the divine One. I felt myself the humblest and the least worthy of them all, as I made again and again the acts of faith, contrition, and divine love. I hid myself away, absorbed in devotion, and a priest soon entered to begin the Mass. With what reverence I followed it! yet thinking always upon the moment when I should be summoned to the altar to receive from those hands the Bread of Eternal Life. A bell tinkled; my heart leaped within me; the next moment I was filled with intense emotion; I saw the linen spread upon the altar railing, and the communicants clustering there. No sooner had one retired than

another filled his place; and presently I found myself—I know not how—kneeling there, and the priest approaching, with the ciborium borne before him.

I could not take my eyes from the sacred Victim; I felt the tears gathering; I heard the voice of him who was about to offer me the divine particle, quivering as he said, "*Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam æternam.*" A delicious perfume seemed to distil upon my lips, where was deposited, with inexpressible tenderness, the Blessed Sacrament. Invisible choirs chanted, "Holy, holy, holy!" and the love which casteth out all fear filled me to overflowing with unspeakable peace.

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Alone in my chamber at home, all that day I wondered if I could ever again stain my lips with even a careless word; wondered how this mighty privilege can be neglected or abused by those whose birth-

right it is; wondered what there could be to long for, or to live for, or to hope for, beyond the pale of the one true Church, into whose majestical bosom I had been received!

XXI.

Now came the day of tribulation, when I was tried as by fire. Upon the first favorable occasion, I told my people, one and all, that I had been baptized a Catholic. Though they were certainly not surprised, and were, perhaps, not greatly grieved, they were, doubtless, somewhat disappointed; and from that day to this —now many years—not one of them has ever attended a religious service with me. Never has the least unkind or uncharitable word been uttered in my presence; on the contrary, they have shown the sweetest tolerance at all times; have served fish on Fridays without fail, and have asked me to notify them of the approach of other fast-days or days of abstinence.

Among my friends, even among my

intimate friends, and especially in the case of two or three frequent guests of the house, it was otherwise The fact of my conversion was soon made public; a personal item to that effect went the rounds of the local journals and ultimately found its way into the Protestant religious press. Whatever may have been said to my parents by their more bigoted co-religionists I know not; for all that was likely to wound my feelings was kept discreetly from me; but I saw in more ways than one that I was no longer held in the same esteem by my associates, and some of them took pains to insult or ridicule me whenever they found opportunity. A few satisfied themselves with merely passing me on the street without recognition, or ignoring my presence when we met in society.

On one occasion a company of my school-mates, with whom I had previously been on the best of terms, locked the door of the room in which we were assembled

to pass a social evening, and there they amused themselves for an hour or more by ridiculing the ceremonials, of whose sacred significance they were ignorant, and of the forms themselves they knew nothing beyond the glimpses they had caught during brief, occasional loungings at a chapel door during service. They burlesqued the Litany, and finally descended to blasphemous pantomimic imitations of the ceremonials of the Mass. I was held in my chair by two powerful youths during this disgraceful orgy, and not suffered to depart until the participants had grown weary of their own sacrilege. Let me add, to the credit of these young men, that nearly all of them afterward made me an apology, though they had no excuse to offer for their misconduct.

Often I was bluntly assured that I had made a fool of myself, and that in less than a year I would bitterly repent the step I had taken. To these assaults I

invariably made no reply; I dared not. I felt that I could offer my friends no proof of my wisdom and honesty in taking the step I had taken—no proof so convincing as to show them by my after-life that I had made no mistake; that, in fact, I had done only what I ought to have done, and in doing it had left nothing undone. I could not always blame them for their injustice to me; if, in my earlier years, any one had assured me that I would eventually become a Catholic I should, no doubt, have been more indignant than I was at the obloquy now heaped upon me.

One man, an old friend of the family, who often filled a seat at our table, met me in the street shortly after my conversion. I saw his face flush furiously as we drew near to one another, and the moment he was about to pass me he stopped short, shook his fist in my face, and hissed, "You'll shortly regret this, my fine young fellow!" Even one of my most intimate and best loved friends—a

man very much my elder, and to whom I was like a foster-child—said to me one day: "I must confess to you that you have fallen greatly in my esteem."

Thus I was gradually cut off from my old associations, and a high wall seemed to be hedging me about. The sudden anger of my friends and associates eventually began to cool; amicable relations were slowly resumed, though the subject of my conversion was always a forbidden one. But those friends were never the same friends to me, nor can they ever be. I had lost something in the estrangement —I hardly knew what,—and it was a sore loss to me at the time; but for that loss I had gained a thousandfold. I had learned the mutability of all human friendship, and learned it when I was most in need of the sympathy of those whom I had loved and trusted.

New sorrows lay in wait for me. My father met with serious reverses; the family circle was broken up and scattered

hither and yon; almost immediately upon this trial followed the sudden death of two well-beloved brothers. I was left alone in my modest lodgings, struggling to obtain a livelihood. Bereaved, betrayed, disheartened, my spirit fainted within me, and my health began to fail. It was then that I found Holy Church to be my sole reliance.

XXII.

My confessor and chosen friend, a young priest of a cheerful temperament and possessed of great vitality, came often to my room; whenever he found himself in the vicinity of my lodgings, he would drop in for a few moments, and his presence was always invigorating and healthful.

Seeing that I needed a change of scene to re-awaken my interest in life, he said to me one morning: "Can you conveniently give me two or three days of your time, and give them wholly to me without question, for me to do what I please with?" I answered that the days were alike to me, and that he was welcome to as many as he could make use of. "Then pack your portmanteau, and be ready for

me at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. The carriage will be at the door."

I listlessly acquiesced. At seven o'clock the carriage *was* at the door, and within it I saw the jovial face of my confessor, my companion, who seemed a very boy in the exuberant anticipation of his holiday. We drove rapidly to the railway station, and were whirled away through the green dales of spring. At a little village not too many miles from town, we exchanged our seats in the train for more lofty ones on the box beside the driver of an old-fashioned stage-coach. There he made merry as we toiled over the breezy hills and bowled through the warm, sweet-scented valleys, taking our way toward the sea-coast, where we arrived at evening.

It was a quiet house we stopped at, one within sound of the sea-surf; having good fishing in the stream that brawled beside the door, and good shooting among the hills that almost overshadowed us. What long, long talks we had there—we

two the only guests in the place, and everybody leaving us quite to our own diversions! what long, long walks, and what sport, also; for my companion was an expert angler and a capital shot! Dreamy, restful days were those we spent together. While he read his Office, pacing up and down the veranda, I swung in the hammock among the rose-trees, and envied him his vocation. When our hour of rest came, we wandered down by the sea, and, throwing ourselves upon the shining sand, just out of reach of the waves, he told me wonderful tales of his seminary life in Rome, and of the almost daily pilgrimages those collegiates of the Propaganda make to the thousand-and-one shrines of the Eternal City. "You must go to Rome," said he; "you must not rest night or day till you have set out on your journey; nor then even, nor ever till you have knelt at the feet of the Vicar of Christ." Thus he began to awaken me to life again. Once more I

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enjoyed the sunshine and the sea and the fresh air of the morning; nor did he pause until he won a smile from me, as he laid before me his plan for my foreign tour.

Many a time I had been told that I had only to go into a Catholic country to become at once disgusted with the faith and with the faithful; this was oftenest the assurance of those who had never been able to see for themselves, but who relied for their authority upon the published works of anti-Catholic travellers. Even those lukewarm admirers of the Church who are free to acknowledge the picturesqueness of her external appurtenances, imagined that I should be shocked by the customs of the country as I drew near to the fountain-head of the faith. My confessor, the story of whose Roman life I had learned by heart; who had filled me with the traditions of his college and of the Propaganda; who had made the way plain for me, so that already I began to feel at home in my dreams of Old-World

travel,—he did not fear to urge me at once into the fields of the faith. Nor did he rest till he had bidden me God-speed as I set out on my pilgrimage—a pilgrimage that was not only to make me familiar with the Basilica of St. Peter and the palace of his successor, but was destined to carry my weary feet along the *Via Dolorosa*, as, with uncovered head, I entered the gates of Jerusalem on my way to Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre.

XXIII.

No sooner had I commenced my pilgrimage than I received unmistakable and indisputable assurances of the unity and universality of the Church of God. When I entered the primitive chapels in the Irish wilderness, and knelt among the impoverished peasantry, it was a familiar voice that spoke to us from the altar. I heard it again in that small convent far away on the shore of the Nile. The deep and unbroken silence of the desert was over us like a spell; the plash of the mighty waters, mingling with an occasional cry of our boatmen, or the sharp bark of some Nubian village dog, was all the sound that fell upon our ears for many days. In the midst of this profound stillness, while even in our waking hours we seemed to slumber, suddenly out of the breathless

morning dropped the golden notes of a bell! The blare of a trumpet could not have been more startling, and with one accord we sprang to our feet and listened.

There are no bells in the Orient. Five times a day the *muezzin* cries, in a high, shrill voice, a call to prayer; and because the Mahometan is all-powerful there he does not choose to listen to the bells of the Christian Church. Here was the voice of one of them crying in the wilderness, and suffered to cry only because it was in the wilderness and far removed. We looked with eager eyes, and just before us, upon the long, low shore of the mysterious river, we saw a convent wall. We sailed up under the shadow of the wall, and were made welcome by a grave Brother of St. Francis. In his charge we were shown over the quaint old building, its cloister fragrant with roses, and its cells so small and bare; and in an inner chamber, hidden away as in a fortress

stood the holy altar, while before the Blessed Sacrament burned the unquenchable lamp.

That voice!—I heard it a thousand times repeated under the soaring dome of St. Peter's fane, and within sight of the seraglio of the Sultan at Stamboul; by the waters of the Greek Sea, and where the palms cluster along the reefs of the South Pacific, and the worshippers are the half-clad children of nature, who have scarcely yet awakened from their sleep of barbarism. It spoke to me in perpetual reassurance from the deck of a ship-of-the line, when the French sailors stood reverently with bowed heads and recited the *Angelus Domini*, as the sun went down into the blue, fathomless ocean.

Shall I ever forget that Easter in Jerusalem, when all the nations of the earth seemed to be gathered together under one banner and into one fold? when every color under heaven dyed the skins of the worshippers, and the costumes of

the pilgrims were a pageant, and their speech the confusion of Babel? Yet the voice from the altar was intelligible to each and all of us; and the priests, who had come in from the four quarters of the globe, spoke in the common tongue, and could speak to one another only in the common tongue—the same which we heard from the altar.

As I journeyed, all the wayside shrines throughout the length and breadth of Europe; all the calvaries, with their agonies wrought in marble; all the crucifixes, and medallions, and pictures of saints and angels, with swinging lamps that twinkle nightly before them; all the fountains where the holy ones have slaked their thirst, and in that act have hallowed them forever; all the caves where they have suffered, and the cells where they have lived and died; all the inanimate objects that have been sanctified by touch or association, and have become animate by reason of this—all, all seemed to me to

be personal and perpetual congratulations and felicitations and benedictions addressed to each of us. If my faith was a blind faith before, it was almost blinding now; for I lived and moved and had my being in the actual presence of these amazing testimonials of the unity and universality of Holy Church.

XXIV.

At Rome I met with a serious accident; my horse stumbled with me in the Campagna, at the dead of night, and together we were precipitated from the edge of a low bridge into the dry bed of a creek. My escape from death was considered almost miraculous. My first thought was of the Church, the cherishing mother into whose lap I longed to throw myself, trusting all to her wisdom and her power. For many weeks I was confined to a bed of pain, but my heart was with her, and I knew that every day—for my case was known—there went up from her altars a prayer for my recovery. She was my hope in this extremity, and I was always looking forward to the hour when I might once more enter her sacred por-

tals, and pour out my heart in love and gratitude to her for my deliverance.

My first visit, on my recovery, was to the Lateran Basilica; it stands against the gate through which I was borne on the sorry night of my mishap. O melting hour, that found me a cripple, though convalescent, dissolved in tears before the altar in the mother of all churches!

All the bells of Rome were music in my ears—the music that beguiled me in my long confinement; and when they rang the *Ave Maria*, it seemed to me that ten thousand glorious tongues were loosed to syllable her praise. Never, no never could I escape from their salutations, for the church-bells ring incessantly in those dear lands. Many a time, in the solemn silence of the Venetian night, have I listened for the clang of the brazen-throated bell that proclaimed the midnight hour; I knew then that in the cool cloisters of San Georgio Maggiore, over the dark lagoon, the sandalled feet of the monks

were seeking the oratory, where prayers are nightly said; I knew that in a little while the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass would be offered upon a myriad altars—the Sacrifice that is perpetually offered; for it is always morning somewhere. I knew that the unceasing prayer of the faithful would be caught up, like an echo that rolls round the world forever and forever; and I folded my hands in peace and fell asleep, reposing, full of love and trust, in the bosom of Holy Church.

Thus it was that the faith in the land of the faithful affected me. Seldom could I pass even one of the many chapels (the doors standing always invitingly open), without entering and kneeling in that serene atmosphere for at least a few moments. All care and worry and discontent stopped without the portals; those feared to enter there. What if I knew that I was to take up the burden again—or at least a part of it—when I passed out into the street? I knew that I could re-

sort as often as I pleased to this saving sanctuary, for no one could prevent me; I knew that in that Catholic land, and in every land where the Altar of God is raised, the Church was my impregnable fortress and the strength of my deliverance!

XXV.

How much, how very much of our reliance is in the Fatherhood of the clergy—the clergy who in their divine office are the oracles of God! Where are you now, young priest, who first turned my stumbling feet out of the darkness into the light? Lost to me in the unity of the priesthood — you, the merest fractional part of the whole; — but somewhere, if you still live, enlightening the ignorant, helping the needy, counselling the perplexed, giving your days to works of mercy and your nights to prayer.

And thou who wast my confessor, to whom my heart was as an open page, wherein thou mightest read to the last syllable—whither has duty called thee; for inclination thou hadst none, save to serve thy Lord and Master? Admirable

Order of reverend and spiritual Fathers! With what zeal I sought the superior, who had graciously summoned me from the distractions of London to the pastoral shades at Roe Hampton! I could not have been more at ease in the first moment of our meeting had I known this reverend Jesuit, and been known of him, all my days; and so we walked and talked, and viewed the riches and the beauties of the mother house, till I was loath to leave and be thrown back again upon the world.

And thou unknown and unnamed confessor, whom I sought in the unparalleled Cathedral of Milan (within whose splendid crypt are treasured the relics of my patron Saint), didst thou not take me to thy heart, out of the hurly-burly, and tenderly shrive me, and as tenderly keep me by thee till thou hadst offered the Holy Sacrifice upon the sumptuous altar where San Carlo's very body is enshrined?—never again to see thee, or to know thee; but

thou art one with all of these, our Fathers, and my gratitude is thine forever.

Illustrious Monseigneur, who unlocked the mysteries of Rome for me, and made straight my paths in the mazes of that mazeful city; in whose home I was at home; at whose hospitable board I was made welcome; who led me to the feet of the Holy Father; whose unremitting kindness spared me many a grief,—shall I ever again behold you, and commune with you in the flesh, in the old fashion which has made Rome a blessed memory to me?

Cowled and tonsured monk, whose happiness it is to dwell within the City of the Holy Sepulchre; whom I sought upon the eve of Easter, and from whose hands I received His Body upon the Mount where He was crucified,—have I not the tangible proof of our most precious conference, the treasured document thou gavest me, and which runs as follows:

[*Seal.*]

In Dei Nomine. Amen.

Omnibus, et singulis præsentes literas inspecturis, lecturis, vel legi audituris, fidem, notumque facimus, Nos Terræ Sanctæ Custos, Devotum Peregrinum [*name*] Jerusalem feliciter pervenisse die 12 Aprilis, anni 1876: inde subsequentibus diebus præcipua sanctuaria, in quibus mundi Salvator dilectum populum suum, immo et totius humani generis perditam congeriem ab inferi servitute misericorditer liberavit, utpote Calvarium ubi cruci affixus, devicta morte, cœli januas nobis aperuit; SS. Sepulcrum, ubi sacrosanctum ejus Corpus reconditum, triduo ante suam gloriosissimam Resurrectionem quievit; ac tandem ea omnia Sacra Palestinæ Loca gressibus Domini, ac Beatissimæ ejus Matris Mariæ consecrata, a religiosis nostris et Peregrinis visitari solita, visitasse, Sanctam Missam audivisse necnon Sacramenta Pœnitentiæ et Eucharistiæ frequentasse. In quorum fidem has scripturas officii nostri sigillo munitas per Secretarium expediri mandavimus.

Datis Jerusalem, ex venerabili nostro Conventu SS. Salvatoris, die [*date*].

Fr. Barnabassab Tuteramna.

[*Seal.*] Secretarius Terræ Sanctæ.

But it is all the same, or should be all the same, whoever or wherever they may

be — whether in the bogs of the Green Isle or in the Celestial City. The Fatherhood is above us and about us, and stands between us and the world, from the Metropolis to the antipodes.

How often have I fled to some reverend Father for relief; to some poor priest, perhaps, whose meagre fare was of fish and cocoanuts; whose house was thatched with palm leaves; whose labors, corporeal as well as spiritual, were far beyond his strength! He has shared his crumb with me, and by his cheerful example and manly encouragement has given me new life, in the hope of making myself worthy to be the spiritual son of such a father. Many a time has the priest of some provincial parish set out his cup of thin wine, his crust of bread, and his lump of goat's-milk cheese—all that he had to offer; and it was offered with a show of genuine and loving hospitality that made each morsel sweeter to the lips than honey. Even when we have been unable to speak any

common tongue there was a bond of sympathy, a responsive echo in our hearts —a brave, strong sentiment, filial and fraternal, peculiar to the Catholic Church, and utterly impossible in any other faith whatever.

Shade of our most Holy Father Pio Nono, whose powerful intercession I now humbly crave: it was at thy feet I knelt twice and thrice, thy mellifluous voice I heard, thy hand that was laid upon my brow, and thy pen that signed my plenary indulgence. Thy blessing has consecrated this precious crucifix now hanging by my bedside, and this statue of thy great predecessor, whose chair thou didst gloriously fill so many years; these beads and medals passed from thy hand to me, sweet saint, thou that wast the father of the Fathers who father us! Once Bishop of Rome, head of the Church Militant, Vicar of Christ on earth—now in the glory of the Church Triumphant,—may the efficacy of the grace thou didst impart to me abide with me forever!

XXVI.

What shall I say of the strong, beautiful, and noble sentiment that prevails throughout the Church, and which is not to be found in any human institution, however loudly it may boast the spirit that is supposed to inspire it,—I refer to to the brotherhood of the faithful? Take the whole catalogue of organizations and societies, whether religious, charitable, social, or political—secret or open,—and where among them will you find the same temper and disposition as among the faithful? where the same ardor, enthusiasm, earnestness, courage, and unanimity? where the same liberty in the enjoyment of the supreme privileges of the sanctuary —fraternity in the common bond of love and trust, and uncompromising equality in the rights of each individual member of

the Church? The prince and the pauper kneel shoulder to shoulder before the altar, and unburden their souls at the feet of the self-same shriver. It does not disturb me if I find upon my right hand the African, were he never so black; on my left, the swarthy Coolie; before me the beggar who knocks daily at my door to ask for food; and behind me the president of a college, the actress from a minor theatre, or the first artist or lawyer in the land. In all probability, they are unconscious of my presence, as I usually am, and always should be, of theirs. In every case, we have sunk our individuality and have become one, by reason of a common love, a common hope, a common trust in the saving grace of the holy Sacraments.

How often have I been touched at the respect paid the dead in Catholic countries; at the reverence with which the business man, hastening to fulfill the duties of the

hour, pauses and lifts his hat as the funeral of the unknown passes him in the street! What pity streams from the eyes of the poor woman who kneels in her humble door-way, and, crossing herself, prays for the repose of the soul that was never known to her in this life; but the body is borne towards the cemetery, and she joins her prayer to the many that are freely offered along the solemn way.

How often have I joined the sad procession that grew and grew as we trod the rough pavement of some little Italian town, following the good priest who was bearing the Holy Viaticum to the house of affliction! The bell was ringing in advance of him and the tapers flaring in the wind; and before the door of that house we knelt, uncovered, in the rain or the shine, repeating the while, in our several languages, the Recommendation of a Departing Soul. "Pray for me! pray for me!" He was a stranger who asked it,

but he was a Catholic and in great physical anguish, and one and all prayed fervently, then and there, for his speedy recovery or happy death.

In the public eating-houses, the wine shops, and the suburban summer-gardens, where the Italians and the Spanish congregate for pleasure and recreation, lamps burn always before the shrine of the Madonna, and the felicitations on holydays are hearty and unanimous. The joyous congratulations at Easter, the universal sorrow in Lent, especially the profound grief of the community when it passes bodily in an involuntary pilgrimage from chapel to chapel, to dwell for a moment upon the agony of our crucified Redeemer, and to mourn over the tomb where they have laid Him, — this is entirely Catholic and peculiarly Roman. Remind me not, O, Brothers in the faith! remind me not of that dear past when, by your side, I made the daily round of the Lenten Stations in the Eternal City; Oh! the deep

delight of those Roman days, though lost to us, forgotten never more. The almost childish delight of the people over the dainty Cribs at Christmas, and the innocent hilarity of Epiphany,—these and a thousand others are sentiments shared in common by the whole body of Holy Church, and prove beyond peradventure the exceptional, the almost phenomenal genuineness of the brotherhood of the faithful.

XXVII.

How could the faithful fail to be more than tolerant — even more than neighborly, one toward another, when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is daily offered for the common good of all? "To me nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Sacrifice of the Mass, said as it is among us,"—so wrote the great and good Cardinal Newman. He adds: "I could attend Masses forever and not be tired. It is not a mere form of words: it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. It is not the invocation merely, but, if I dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal." It is the Sacred Drama daily, hourly, perpetually enacted upon the altars of the whole world; the Passion, Agony and Death, vicariously suffered for our sakes,—a di-

vine tragedy of singular simplicity, of unparalleled pathos, in the witnessing of which hard, indeed, is the heart that is not melted!

When I recall my first impressions of the Mass—if in my bewilderment I can be said to have received any impression whatever,—I assure myself that the majority of Protestants and unbelievers, who look coldly or curiously upon the altar, are as little mindful of the sacred significance of the Sacrifice and as unworthy spectators as was I. Oh! the loss to these! Do we not see in the gravity of the celebrant as he bears the chalice to the altar, our Lord entering the Garden of Gethsemane? It is the first scene in the mystical drama, and every breath is hushed. The divine One is burdened with a foreknowledge of His doom. He kneels in the garden: the Holy Sacrifice begins; we kneel with Him, and are to follow Him, step by step, to the very end.

At the *Confiteor*, He has fallen upon

His face, bathed in the sweat of blood; He is betrayed with a kiss, led away captive, grievously smitten, and denied. The celebrant turns to us at the *Dominus vobiscum*, and in his glance we see the conversion of Peter. Our Lord is led before Pilate, brought to Herod, scornfully sent back again to Pilate. He is spoiled of His garments—at the unveiling of the chalice,—scourged, and crowned with thorns. Pilate washes his hands of the crime, and at the moment the celebrant moistens his fingers. "Behold the Man!" cries Pilate; and the voice from the altar pleads, "*Orate fratres.*"

At the Preface, we hear the warning bell. The awful progress of the tragedy is watched in breathless silence; only from the organ-loft comes the wail of the singers. The bell rings; He is condemned to death, and made to bear His Cross, while His brow is wiped with the handkerchief of Veronica, and the effigy of that sorrowful Face is retained forever.

He is nailed to the Cross, and at the Elevation of the Host, while the chiming bells mark every posture of the celebrant at the altar; while the torch bearers gather about, the smoking censers are swung aloft, the flowers are scattered upon the air, and, if it be a Military Mass, the whole body silently presents arms; while the devout kneelers bow their heads and beat their breasts in contrition, lo! the Cross is raised on high! A moment later, the elevated chalice seems to catch the water and the blood that gush from the riven Heart of Him who died for us.

In the *Memento*, which follows, He is praying for the world; He is merciful to the penitent thief; He thirsts, and He utters the Seven Words upon the Cross. (Here the *Pater Noster* is loudly chanted.) He dies, He descends into hell; and at the *Agnus Dei*, while the bells chime again, there is the conversion of many at the Cross. In Holy Communion, we commemorate His burial, and His anoint-

ing in the last ablution of the celebrant. His Resurrection follows, and He appears to His disciples at the *Dominus vobiscum.* The last Collect is a memory of His forty days with the disciples; the last *Dominus vobiscum*, of His glorious Ascension; and with the Benediction descends the Holy Ghost!

O marvellous Sacrament! mysterious, majestical! O never-failing source of joy! what a privation is theirs who, having once known Thee, are parted from Thee! How do they survive who trust not in Thee, who hope not through Thee, and who seek Thee and know Thee not?

XXVIII.

Holy Virgin, Our Blessed Lady, who hast graciously appeared to us, and who hath appeared only unto us! Mother of God, and of Christ, which is God; Mother of divine grace; most pure, most chaste, undefiled, inviolate; most amiable, most admirable; Mother of our Creator and of our Redeemer! how can we forget thee, remembering what thou wast and art and ever shalt be!

Blessed day that found me treading the narrow streets of Bethlehem, kneeling at the Shrine of the Nativity glorious with the light that shone from clusters of golden lamps, and the golden star in the midst thereof—the star that is adored to-day by the true Magi of the earth! Day most blessed that found me mourning with thee upon Calvary, and beside the stone of the

sepulchre, and descending reverently into the grotto of thy tomb! Blessed evening at the close of that blessed day in Loreto, when the thousands and tens of thousands of pilgrims had gone to their weary beds upon the pavements or among the neighboring pastures and vineyards, even there to hymn thy praises to the stars, thou Star of stars!—when the young monk led me by a private door into that great temple, and alone we entered the Holy House that was borne by angels away from the desecrations of the barbarous infidel, and at last set upon the hill whose name has become glorious throughout the earth. Blessed beads and medals that have been pressed against the stones of the Holy House, and laid within the precious bowls that thou didst use in Nazareth, and that were deposited upon the altar within the Holy House where thy sacred and supernatural image stands, and were blessed again, to mind me of my privileges then and there! Blessed Rock of Lourdes,

within whose cleft she stood, and spoke articulate words, while at her feet the very breast of nature was stirred, so that a fountain gushed forth as from the heart of it, and is to-day confounding the wise, and making wise the foolish! Blessed *souvenir*, thou wee statuette of silver, in case of bluest velvet, that hast been dipped in that fount of grace, the miraculous flood of Lourdes, and goest with me where I go, a talisman most precious!

O Virgin most prudent, most renowned, most powerful, merciful and faithful! whose sorrows have wrung my heart, whose joys have thrilled me; before whose mirrored graces, as set forth in marble or upon canvas, I have cast myself in my extremity, and lit my votive taper, and anointed myself with the oil of the sacred lamps. Mirror of justice, Seat of wisdom, Cause of our joy: if but they all might know thee as we know thee, and love thee as we love thee! Spiritual vessel, Vessel of honor, Vessel of singular devotion:

touch their hearts. Mystical rose, whose fragrance intoxicates the soul; Tower of David, Tower of ivory, House of gold: shine upon them, and fill their eyes with light! Ark of the Covenant, Gate of heaven: may they be made worthy to enter in to thee! Morning star, illumine their everlasting night; Health of the weak, restore them to the bosom of that fold without which there is no strength; Refuge of sinners, oh! receive them; Comforter of the afflicted, gather them in thine arms, and comfort them. Help of Christians, aid us so to live that we may enlighten them by our example. Queen of angels and of patriarchs and prophets; Queen of Apostles and of martyrs and confessors; Queen of virgins and of all saints; Queen of Heaven, pray for us!

XXIX.

Picture the barrenness of a mind that can not conceive the idea of a saint; of a heart that refuses to accept the amazing proofs of human perfection achieved through the aid of special grace, absolute humility, and the purifying, sanctifying, consuming love of God! No Protestant and no infidel can do this; they are, therefore, cut off from the fellowship which the Catholic is permitted to share with the saints in glory.

With a single exception, the saints were, like us, conceived in sin. Three nativities alone does the Church commemorate — our Lord's, Our Blessed Lady's, and St. John's; but what a cloud of witnesses assemble at the Throne of Grace! Consider the extraordinary company of holy angels and archangels; of

all the holy orders of blessed spirits; of patriarchs and prophets, Apostles and Evangelists, and disciples of our Lord. Consider the Holy Innocents and martyrs; the bishops, confessors, doctors, priests and levites; the monks and hermits, the virgins and widows, and all the holy men and women, saints of God, on whom we are permitted to call in prayer. Their supernatural virtues are proven in their supernatural acts; their miracles bear them witness a thousandfold.

Miracles? Not in one of all their miracles do they defy the laws of nature; but rather, there is some subtle and superior law of nature subservient to them, and to them alone. The miracle of yesterday, or of to-day, or of the forever—the blind receiving sight, the dumb speaking, the lame and the halt walking, and even the dead brought back to life, are disputed; yet the incontrovertible testimony of the multitudes of eye-witnesses stands to the truth of each and all of these. Miracles! These

are our inheritance, and nowhere else is the like seen, or heard of, or dreamt of; and these are the scorn of the unbelieving, and by them are they received with measureless, impotent derision. What can they expect who hope nothing, trust nothing, believe nothing? On the steps of the precious altar in Naples, under my very eyes, within reach of my very hands and lips, the congealed blood of St. Januarius returned to life, and bubbled and throbbed within the vial which was twice inclosed within the reliquary, lightly poised in the hands of the Cardinal. "A mere chemical trick!" cry alike the scientist and the simpleton; "a trick which we can duplicate at pleasure"; but they have never duplicated it! Nor do the boasts of the rationalists avail aught. Still are the shrines of the saints ablaze with the glitter of ex-votos, the bandit's dagger is laid at the feet of the Madonna; the carbine of the brigand is surrendered before the altar of Our Lady, and he returns into the wilderness with a

heart as soft as the lamb's fleece that covers his broad shoulders, but with a step as proud and manly as ever trod the earth.

O beautiful ships! hewn with deft and loving fingers in the mariner's painful leisure, memorials of his vow when delivered out of the jaws of death, and offered to thee, Notre Dame de la Garde. Thy golden statue crowns the dome of thy temple upon the hill-top above Marseilles; like a glimmering star thou shinest upon the watery track of the departing voyager; and thou sendest afar the first ray that welcomes him on his return.

O touching and pathetic testimonials of grace received, indisputable, unanswerable proofs of thy miraculous love, Our Lady of Lourdes! There is the treasury: the innumerable crutches, rests, stretchers, strange wheeling-chairs, and all the harnesses of torture from which thou didst deliver those suffering ones who put their faith in thee, Our Lady of Lourdes!

O saints'-days and name-days, the birth-

days of the soul! how welcome your return—thrice welcome, for the treble joy and peace and love that are one with you! O saints of God! tempted in your turn, alike as we are, but putting temptation far from you, and dwelling alone with God: you teach us by your example what we may strive to do; you prove to us by your victory that to strive in your spirit is to triumph in your path. The knowledge of your weakness is our strength, and your strength our shield and buckler. How can any one refuse to know you, and, knowing you, refuse to love and reverence you? Even in death you are all-powerful, and live again in the very garments that clothed you in life, filling them with virtues potential. O everlasting examples of the infinite beauty of holiness, of the unconquerable power of love, and of the unfading lustre of charity and humility and innocence! We are yours, ye chosen of God, and would be one with you! O intercede for us!

XXX.

Alone no more forever! In the darkness of the night, in the solitude of the desert and of the sea, and in that more awful solitude which the stranger in a strange land knows and suffers, feeling himself the unrecognized decimal in the infinite multitude,—thou art with me, my ever-watchful and protecting Guardian Angel! I know not thy name, nor the fashion of thy form or features; but in my dreams, waking or sleeping, I seem to see thee, clad in robes of beauty, thy wings folded in perfect peace, thy shining brow half shaded by locks celestial, and thy calm eyes, that never close in slumber, fixed on mine with a glance of love unspeakable. Often I must grieve thee, for I am human and thou art divine; but because thou art divine thou wilt pity and

forgive my human weakness. How can I sin in thy sight, immaculate spirit! how can I yield to the temptations of the traducer! With what anguish must thou follow my wilful and stumbling steps, throwing thine arms about me in the moment of my fall; seeking, alas! vainly, to lead me back into the straight way; pricking my conscience with the thorn of reproof, till it cries out against me in thy name and with thy voice!

Silent counsellor! how often hast thou stood between me and the unseen or unheeded danger that was threatening me! How tenderly hast thou smoothed the pillow on my bed of pain, and witnessed with grief the torments of this poor body! In my saddest hour, perchance, thou hast mingled thy tears with mine, and folded me to thy heart to compassionate me—and I not mindful of thee! Heavenly guest, whose home is in my heart, I give thee a thousand times ten thousand welcomes! Let me not lose

thee, nor forget thee, nor cease from reposing trustfully in thee, O loving and beloved! In my last hour may thy arms receive my fainting soul, and thy bosom sustain it in its agony!

XXXI.

I do not know what hope the Protestant has in the future of the departed soul. As for the infidel, he has none whatever, and this is his pitiful boast. The Protestant believer launches the spirit into space; from that melancholy moment it is no more to him than a memory—a memory which, in the course of nature, must fade away. He hopes to follow in due season, and vaguely hopes to find his own somewhere among the innumerable hosts of the immortals; but until that hour has come there is an absolute separation, a complete sundering of all the natural ties of affinity and consanguinity. The separation is as absolute, the sundering as complete, as if a fathomless pit yawned between them—a pit whose awful depths echo no voice of hope, and from whose

distant limits shines no familiar or unfamiliar form. Their fellowship ends with the grave. Can anything be sadder than this? Of course, no reasonable being, within whose soul has sprung one aspiration, however feeble, can for a moment tolerate the theory of total annihilation.

There are Protestants who believe that "hell is paved with infant skulls not a span long." There are some who believe in universal salvation; how could heaven be more desirable than earth in such a case? But the majority of Protestants are quite unsettled as to exactly what they believe and what disbelieve. How miserable must be this state of uncertainty; how cheerless the thought of a future life; how bitter the pang of death! Suffered to die helplessly, without the aid of the sacraments, and dismissed into the mysterious chamber beyond the veil, alone, unguided and unaided; its heavenly guardian unheeded in death as in life; the communion of the saints unrecog-

nized; the glory and the majesty and the might of that love which streams from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of Mary most clement, Mother of our Redeemer, denied and derided:—what has not the Protestant soul to unlearn, and what to learn after that, before it can enjoy the repose of the faithful?

O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory, when by the side of the bed of death stands the one into whose hands is given the power to loose and to bind sin? Contrast the death of the Protestant with the death of the good Catholic. I have already pictured the former, and now it is the latter that we look on, while the prayers for the sick are said, and the last Sacraments are solemnly administered; while the dying eyes are fixed upon the image of our crucified Redeemer and of Our Lady of Sorrows; while the blessed candle is in readiness, and the blessed water is sprinkled from time to time over and about the

devoted pillow; while perpetual aspirations hover upon the lips, and the "Last Sighs of the Dying" are breathed into the ear; while each throb of the heart responds to the thrice blessed names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; when the "Recommendation of a Departing Soul" —that glorious prayer, upon the wings of which it is borne heavenward—is recited:

"Receive Thy servant, O Lord! into the place of salvation, which he hopes from Thy mercy. Amen.

"Deliver, O Lord! the soul of Thy servant from all danger of hell, from all pain and tribulation. Amen.

"Deliver, O Lord! the soul of Thy servant, as Thou didst deliver Enoch and Elias from the common death of the world. Amen.

"As Thou didst deliver Noe from the flood; Abraham from the midst of the Chaldeans; Job from all his afflictions; Isaac from sacrifice; Lot from the flames of Sodom; Moses from the hands of Pha-

raoh; Daniel from the lions' den; the three children from the fiery furnace, and from the hands of an unmerciful king; Susanna from her false accusers; David from the hands of Goliath and Saul; and as Thou didst deliver that blessed virgin and martyr, St. Thecla, from most cruel torments, so vouchsafe to deliver the soul of this Thy servant, and bring it to the participation of Thy heavenly joys. Amen."

So passes the faithful soul to judgment; after which, if not ushered at once into the ineffable glory of the Father, it pauses for a season in the perpetual twilight of that border land where the spirit is purged of the very memory of sin. Even as our Lord Himself descended into Limbo; as He died for us, but rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, so we hope to rise and follow Him,—sustained by the unceasing prayers of the Church, the intercession of the saints, and all the choirs of the just, who are called on night

and day, and also by the prayers and pleadings of those who have loved us and who are still in the land of the living.

The prayers that ease the pangs of purgatory, the *Requiem*, the *Miserere*, the *De profundis*—these are the golden stairs upon which the soul of the redeemed ascends into everlasting joy. Even the Protestant Laureate of England has confessed the poetical justice and truth of this, and into the mouth of the dying Arthur—that worthy knight—he puts these words:

"Pray for my soul! More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of; wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day:
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

O ye gentle spirits that have gone before me, and who are now, I trust, dwelling in the gardens of Paradise, beside the

river of life that flows through the midst thereof,—ye whose names I name at the Memorial for the Dead in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,—as ye look upon the lovely and shining countenances of the elect, and perchance upon the beauty of our Heavenly Queen, and upon her Son in glory,—O remember me who am still this side of the valley of the shadow, and in the midst of trials and tribulations. And you who have read these pages, written from the heart, after much sorrow and long suffering, though I be still with you in the flesh, or this poor body be gathered to its long home,—you whose eyes are now fixed upon this line, I beseech you

PRAY FOR ME!

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